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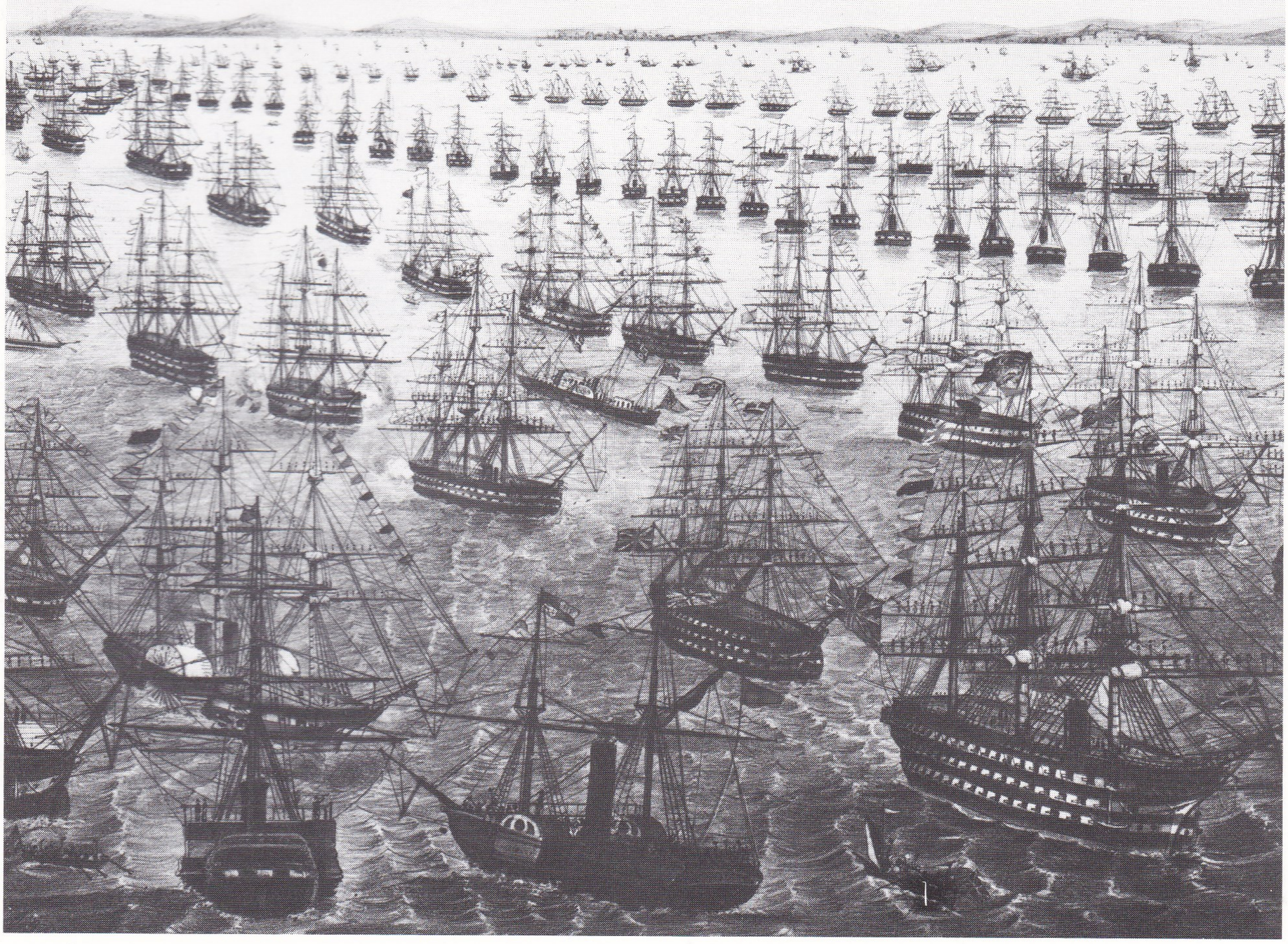
# *The Wind of Change: Naval Reviews at Spithead 1842–56*



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*Naval Review at Spithead 23 April 1856*
National Maritime Museum

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# THE WIND OF CHANGE: NAVAL REVIEWS AT SPITHEAD 1842–56

G. R. Wade, BA, MLS, ALA

On a cold and wet Monday morning in October 1982 the *Mary Rose* was lifted from the sea bed and returned to her home base, Portsmouth, where she had been built more than 470 years earlier. She now occupies dry dock No. 3 alongside HMS *Victory* in the dockyard. These two vessels are expected to be joined in 1987 by HMS *Warrior*, the first British 'ironclad' to be built for the Royal Navy. All three ships represent important landmarks in the development of naval architecture, and between them they have stimulated a new public interest in how our navy has evolved. It is possible to demonstrate how the evolution of the fighting ship was reflected in Royal Naval Reviews, with which Portsmouth has special links. The advantages of this approach are twofold: it tells us something about exciting moments in Portsmouth's history, and it allows us to note important changes in naval architecture. As a correspondent for the *Shipping World and Herald of Commerce* remarked in 1889:

> The periodical assemblage and inspection of a large part of the naval fighting force of the country is one of those events which, apart from the gratification of a natural feeling of pleasure in witnessing such a magnificent display, opens out to the thoughtful mind a much wider field of interest; it forms a living and visible chapter in naval history, and a continuous record of the splendid triumphs of skill of the naval architect and marine engineer.[1]

Fleet reviews have long been associated with the Spithead roadstead situated between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, where officially they have taken place since 1773.[2] At no time were they more varied, however, in their social, political and military context than during the sixty-four years which spanned Queen Victoria's reign. It was during this period that vessels of the Royal Navy underwent the transition from what were essentially modified versions of HMS *Victory*, to complex steel battleships, one step removed from the *Dreadnought*.

Within the Victorian age the Crimean War (1854–1856) can be seen as a naval watershed, following which the wind of technical change in the Royal Navy was most clearly in evidence. It is the era leading up to and including this dénouement which is the subject of the present paper. It was a period when sailing warships were still the mainstay of the realm: but in an age of industrial revolution the writing was on the wall for these creaking wind-dependent machines of war.

Following the long series of French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, Britain emerged victorious with no power to fear. As the only truly industrialised nation, and with a massive lead in commerce, transport, insurance and finance, as well as an extensive colonial empire, she was ideally placed to expand her interests. For much of the nineteenth century British sea power exercised an influence unprecedented in maritime history; the era of Pax Britannica, as it came to be known, had begun. But success brought its problems.

In 1815 Britain possessed no less than 214 ships-of-the-line and 792 cruisers. Within the next five years, however, more than 550 warships were sold or scrapped and by 1835 the number of ships-of-the-line fit for service had fallen to 58.[3] Furthermore, vessels which had been constructed hastily for the Napoleonic wars were built from poor quality unseasoned timber, so that in many instances the wooden walls of England were rotten.[4] Such a naval force was adequate in the immediate post-war years of retrenchment but by 1842, when Queen Victoria first officially inspected a squadron of warships at Spithead, the situation confronting the Admiralty was very different.

Government policy had reduced the fighting capacity of the Royal Navy, whilst the growth of Britain's trade with the world assisted an expanding merchant fleet at the expense of skilled seamen to man the ships of the Royal Navy. Imperial commitments led to the dispersal and therefore dilution of fighting power, and the increasing size of warships consequent upon various technical improvements meant either that more men were needed per ship so that fewer vessels could be commissioned, or that many capital ships were severely under-manned. This in turn had its effect upon the experience which could be given to naval officers through active service, a problem compounded by the inflated *Navy List* which resulted from the principle of promotion by seniority and the large number of officers put on half pay at the close of the Napoleonic wars. With the absence of a system of retirements, septuagenarians were soon commanding fleets.[5]

The predicament confronting the Admiralty was clearly demonstrated in 1840 by the Syrian crisis which nearly dragged Britain and France to war. It highlighted the manning problem, revealed the potential of steamers in the service, emphasised the malady of the Ottoman Empire and necessitated a permanent force of warships in the Mediterranean to protect British interests. In 1832 Palmerston had been unable to help Turkey because he simply did not have any spare ships-of-the-line.[6] Such a shortcoming could not be repeated.

The widespread adoption of steamers by the world's leading navies added a special dimension to Britain's difficulties, for steam, although untried, threatened to nullify her enormous lead in the wooden sailing warship.[7] And yet their Lordships, contrary to popular myth, took the developments in steam navigation most seriously, not as reactionaries, but exercising caution where appropriate

*The Queen's Visit to HMS* Queen *at Portsmouth 1 March 1842*
National Maritime Museum

and willing to apply the new technology if a strong enough case could be put forward. Consequently, when Queen Victoria visited Portsmouth in the spring of 1842, paddle steamers were a legitimate arm of the nation's senior service, whilst later that year screw propulsion would, for the first time, be adopted in some of Her Majesty's ships.[8]

**1842**

The Queen's desire to visit Portsmouth with Prince Albert, who had never been there, was communicated by Lord Haddington (the First Lord of the Admiralty) to Sir Edward Codrington (the Commander-in-Chief of the Portsmouth Naval Station, renowned for his controversial destruction of the Turco-Egyptian fleet at Navarino) on 18 February, a mere ten days before the projected event.[9] Her Majesty originally intended to travel to Portsmouth from Brighton (where the court was in residence) on the 14th and return the same day, but she was unaware of the distance involved. When this became apparent she decided to postpone the visit until sleeping arrangements could be made. Accordingly Lord Haddington wrote to George Anson, Prince Albert's Private Secretary, assuring the Queen that the Admiral's House 'was always at the disposal of the Sovereign – having been . . . built upon that principle, and that it had been occupied by the Allied Powers in 1814'.[10] From that moment frantic efforts were made to ensure that everything should be ready in time. Such short notice caused no small bustle in the dockyard and harbour according to the *Naval and Military Gazette*.[11] But this, and the appellation 'Grand Naval Review' which has been accorded the occasion by some writers, should not hide the fact that it was quite unlike the great reviews which characterised the later years of Queen Victoria's reign. In 1842 the ships inspected were few in number[12], and although the crowds were enthusiastic the celebrations were of local, professional or personal interest for those involved.

The visit took place at a time of considerable unrest in the realm, which the newly elected Tory government, led by Sir Robert Peel, had to tackle. The economy was in a bad way, the Corn Laws evoked stiff opposition, agricultural interests clashed with manufacturing interests, the country was involved in a war in the East (the Queen learning of serious reverses in Afghanistan during the week)[13] and there was great distress amongst the poor at home. The inclement weather at Portsmouth seemed to match the political climate, but fortunately the Queen was impervious to rough seas, charmed everyone and enjoyed her brief sojourn immensely.

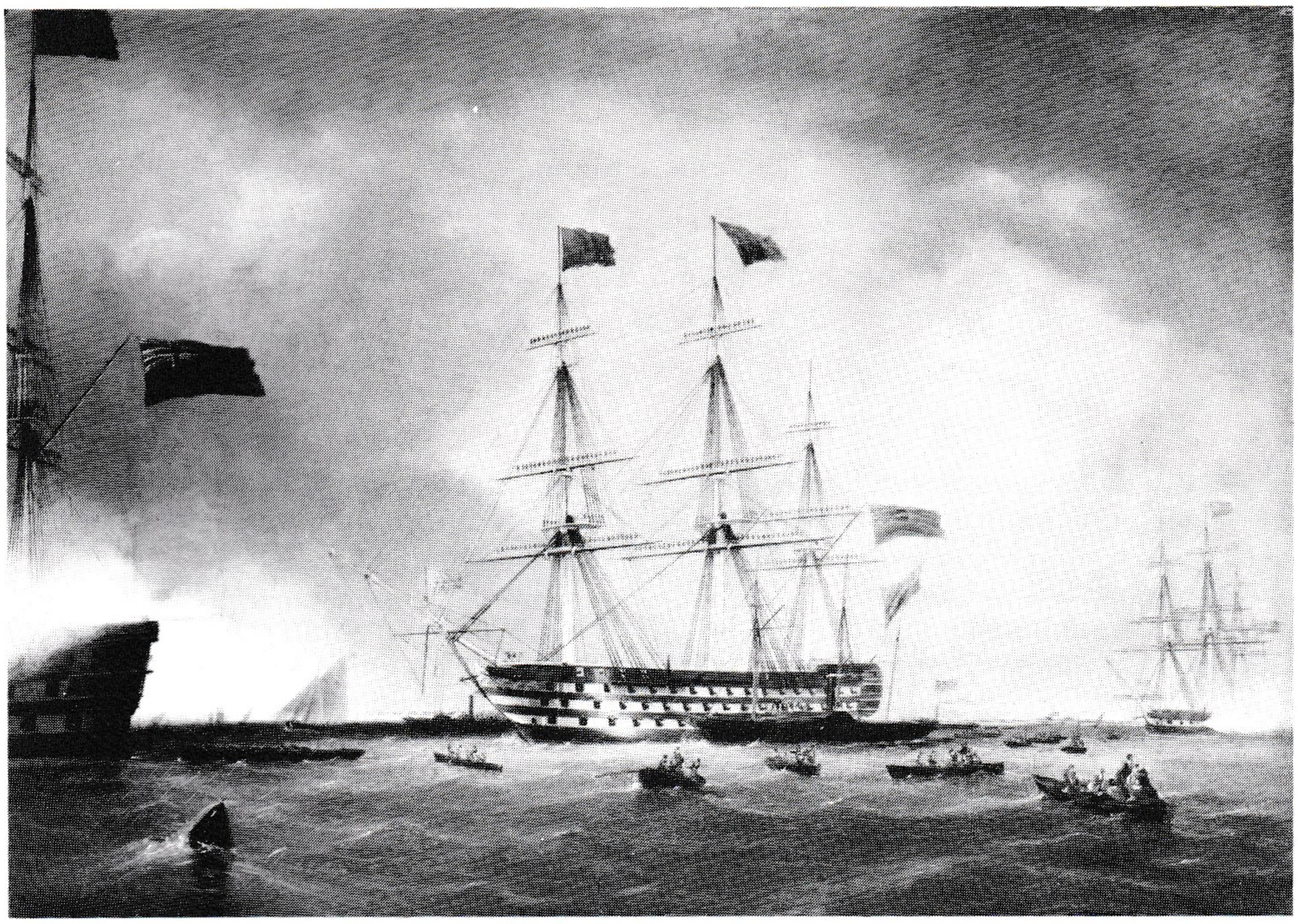
It had been arranged that the young Sovereign and her consort should arrive on Monday morning (28 February), sleep at the Admiralty House in the dockyard that night, and depart the following afternoon.[14] Accordingly, a suite of apartments was quickly made ready under the supervision of Mr Saunders of the Lord Chamberlain's office, and Lord Beauclerk, aide-de-camp to the Queen, preceded the official guests to the Admiral's residence to ensure that everything was in order.[15] The royal party included the Queen's uncle Ferdinand (Duke of Saxe-Coburg) and his two sons, Augustus and Leopold. They were accompanied by the aged Duke of Wellington (Lord Lieutenant of the County) who proved to be very popular with the crowds which flocked into Portsmouth.

Following a triumphant entrance at Landport, escorted by a company of the Scots Greys and led by 39 rope-makers dressed in white jackets and trousers and wearing blue silk scarfs, the royal cortège stopped at the Lion Gate. It was here that Sir Hercules Pakenham (military governor) presented the keys of the garrison town to the Queen. Her Majesty should have returned them, but she was so intrigued by their size and curious appearance that she placed them inside her carriage instead, returning them upon arrival at the dockyard gates.[16]

After lunch at the Admiralty House, a visit was made to the gunnery ship HMS *Excellent* by Prince Albert and the Queen's uncle and cousins, reflecting a growing interest in gunnery. Later in the afternoon, despite heavy rain and high winds, Queen Victoria visited the flagship HMS *St Vincent* and the *Royal George* yacht moored in the harbour, although she did not accompany the men when they subsequently inspected the Block Manufactory, Blacksmith's Shop and Copper Foundry in the dockyard. During this tour Sir Edward Codrington, now in his seventies, was quick to praise his old friend Marc Brunel, designer and builder of the block-making machinery, as the distinguished visitors watched the creation of a ten-inch wooden block within a matter of minutes. This invention was possibly the first large-scale mass production unit in the world, saved the navy a great deal of money and was in use until the 1950s.[17]

Several itinerant lamplighters, with their stock in trade, had arrived at Portsmouth by rail throughout Sunday, and although the rain and wind persisted during Monday evening, there were some impressive illuminations to be seen in the town, which complemented those displayed by the ships in harbour and at Spithead.[18]

The principal attraction for Queen Victoria during her stay at Portsmouth, however, was on the Tuesday morning, when she visited HMS *Queen* anchored at Spithead – the first three-decker launched since her accession. In spite of thick, drizzling rain, the young monarch remained on deck as the Admiralty steamer, *Black Eagle*, conveyed its illustrious passenger out of harbour amidst loud cheering



from the huge crowds which thronged the jetty, ramparts and saluting battery. The band of the Royal Marines struck up 'Rule Britannia' and 21-gun salutes were fired from the Platform and Fort Monckton.

Arriving at Spithead, the royal party proceeded round the ships lying at anchor with their yards manned, before steering alongside HMS *Queen*. This noble vessel differed little in outward appearance from the ships which had fought at Trafalgar, except that, apart from being larger, her sides were striped with white paint, she had reduced external decoration and sheer, her waist was closed in to form a flush spar deck (which increased longitudinal strength) and her yards were painted yellow.

Having inspected the cabin, store rooms, tiers and cockpit, all of which were brilliantly illuminated with lanthorns and variegated lamps, the Queen expressed a desire to see the ship's company at dinner. When she tasted the grog and soup from the men's own utensils and pronounced herself satisfied, the crew gave her three hearty cheers. Some newspapers, however, suggested that the Queen considered the grog to be too weak,[19] and *Punch* naturally capitalised on the rumour:

> In consequence of the remark of the Queen, that the grog tasted by Her Majesty at Portsmouth was not strong enough, the liquor has been analysed and the following is the result of the process:
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | Pure Rum ..... | 1 | in 100 |
> | Purser's Thumb ..... | 9 | do |
> | Animalculae ..... | 13 | do |
> | Water ..... | 77 | do |
> | Total | 100 | |
>
> It is understood that Her Majesty tested the strength of the liquor by its effect on her own spirits, which were not raised in the least by the mouthful she took of it. The Queen declares that the grog is the only weak point in the British Navy.[20]

Whatever Her Majesty thought of the grog she was clearly impressed with HMS *Queen*. Writing to Lord Melbourne from Brighton later that week, she commented: 'She is a magnificent ship, so wide and roomy, and though only just commissioned, in the best order. With marines, etc., her crew is near upon a thousand men!'[21] The striking appearance of the warship had been enhanced by tricing up the bulkheads on the lower deck in order to give a continuous view from bow to stern of the splendid battery of 32 and 68 pounder cannon.

The *Naval and Military Gazette* records that whilst the royal guests were on board, Her Majesty requested that Sir William Symonds should be presented to point out the various improvements he had introduced in shipbuilding. According to his biographer, Sir William had prepared full particulars of the ship for the royal couple on a card, and Prince Albert, who had seen a model of the *Queen* at Somerset House, showed great interest in everything.[22]

Symonds had been appointed Surveyor in 1832 thanks to the exceptional sailing qualities of his designs. He gave his ships greater beam (a fact noticed by the Queen) and a more wedge-shaped bottom, thus improving speed, stability and strength. His ships required less ballast and so permitted increased stowage capacity and armaments,[23] and they were loftier between decks than their forerunners. In addition, Symonds introduced the concept of standardised fittings, notably for masts, yards and rigging, which made the provision of spare parts so much easier. Unfortunately, his ships were apt to roll excessively, and in the opinion of Lyon, they provided atrocious gun platforms.[24] Even so, Symonds worked hard to improve ship construction. He built the *Queen*, for example, upon the 'new system of iron riders and thick strakes on the head and heel of the timber, instead of the large wooden

riders and trusses of Sir R. Seppings',[25] and he gave her an elliptical stern instead of a round one, which, it has been argued, afforded increased protection to the rudder head.[26] It may seem logical to later generations that the advantages of iron construction should have been applied to all parts of a ship, indeed to dispense with wood altogether as a building material. But such an assumption would fail to take into account Britain's inviolate 'wooden walls' which evoked emotional support from the public and many naval officers alike at this time. Not that the hard-headed pragmatists who ran the navy would have been unduly influenced by such sentiments. To them timing and technical competence were more important considerations. It must be appreciated that in the 1840s the science of metallurgy was still in its infancy.[27] Perhaps the feeling of the country at this time was best summed up by Queen Victoria herself, when, a week after her visit to Portsmouth, she wrote to her uncle, the King of the Belgians:

> You will have heard how well our Portsmouth expedition went off; the sea was quite smooth on Tuesday, and we had a delightful visit to the *Queen*, which is a splendid ship. I think it is in these immense wooden walls that our real greatness exists, and I am proud to think that no other nation can equal us in this . . .[28]

So ended a highly successful stay at Portsmouth for the young monarch who vowed that it would not be long before she returned to the port.

On a personal level the royal visit revealed the extent to which nepotism and individual patronage affected the limited opportunities for promotion within the service. Sir Edward Codrington complained to the Earl of Liverpool (Lord Steward) that 'some of the Admiralty people are taking measures for grasping the promotions which it usually falls to the patronage of the Commander-in-Chief, on occasions of such a visit as this for which we are preparing'.[29] He cited Sir George Cockburn as the source of this interference, to whom he said, he was indebted for injustice relative to the battle of Navarino.

In the dockyard there was resentment, too, because the post of first foreman of smiths in the forge had been given to an apprentice who knew nothing of the business and was incompetent, but who succeeded through borough voting. This man left all the work to those who were formerly above him. Now he was dead and Sir Edward Codrington wrote several letters on behalf of the wronged men in the forge to obtain justice when refilling the vacancy.[30]

On a lighter note, we cannot leave contemporary accounts of this visit without reference to a charming incident involving the aged Duke of Wellington when on board HMS *Queen*. It seems that

> [as] the illustrious visitors were returning to go up again on deck, the Duke of Wellington dropped his plume. Miss Codrington picked it up, and while rolling it in her handkerchief His Grace stood waiting to receive it. 'You must not expect this again, my Lord', said she; 'Ah, I lose many things in that way', replied the Duke, 'I suppose you must keep it'.[31]

An interesting sequel to this event which once again reflects the high esteem in which the Duke was held, concerns his apparent instability throughout Her Majesty's visit. On the Monday there had been cause for concern when he missed his footing whilst going down the hatchway of the *St Vincent*. The next morning events seemed set to repeat themselves aboard the *Queen* when 'he caused great uneasiness to the sailors around him by unsteadily mounting and descending the companion ladders with his hands encumbered with his large cocked hat and his umbrella, and pertinaciously refusing any help whatever. Many a hand was offered to relieve him of the umbrella, and none could imagine why the offer seemed to vex him so much, until we afterwards learnt that this offer of holding his umbrella for him had been used as a trick by his admirers to obtain and carry it off as a memorial of him: he had lost so many umbrellas by this means, that he was now resolved to hold it for himself'.[32]

To some extent the visit to Portsmouth in 1842 marked the end of an era. It was to be the last time that a monarch travelled there by a coach and four in order to inspect ships of the Royal Navy. It was also the penultimate occasion upon which sailing ships alone were reviewed, although there were a number of steamers in harbour at the time. The direct railway line to Portsmouth from London did not exist then, and it is interesting to note that the Board of Admiralty travelled by train to Gosport using the newly opened branch line from Eastleigh.

No mass press coverage of this early review was feasible, but the provision of an electric telegraph from the Admiralty to Portsmouth dockyard by March 1847, and the opening of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway line to Portsmouth in June 1847, together with the elimination of the newspaper stamp duty in 1855, helped to pave the way for the highly popular Spithead reviews which featured in every decade of the century thereafter.

**1844**

On 2 March, the day after Queen Victoria left Port-

smouth, the Admiralty announced that henceforth all HM ships would carry full war complements,[33] as indeed the ships assembled at Spithead for the Queen's reception had been instructed to do. This was probably a reaction to the Syrian crisis which found French ships with war complements whilst many British ships were dangerously under-manned. Unfortunately, such a move merely exacerbated the already severe shortage of seamen which had occasioned the commissioning of ships with reduced peace time establishments in the first place. It led almost inevitably to the recurrent theme of the 1840s that the British Isles were defenceless against a sudden and resolute attack so long as the fleet was dispersed throughout the world at the expense of the home stations. What made such allegations potent was the rapid increase in the number of steamers in the French navy at this period.

Following its humiliating retreat over the Syrian crisis, the French navy had been confronted with the unpalatable recognition of the overall superiority of British sea power. Steamers were felt to be a way of redressing the balance, for without needing to match the massive strength of the Royal Navy, a few small well armed and fast steamers could wreak great tactical havoc and so stretch the extent of defence resources throughout the world. They would nullify her supremacy at sea. The potential of war steamers in this context had been realised as early as 1822 when Henri-Joseph Paixhans published his *Nouvelle Force Maritime*, but at that time no navy was prepared to conduct costly experiments with new ships, and marine technology was still in its infancy. By the 1840s great strides had been made in engine design, boiler pressure and fuel consumption. It was also becoming clear to the British people that the ability of steamers to operate irrespective of wind and tide, posed grave security problems for the country. The stage was set for a chain of events which were to culminate in Queen Victoria's second Spithead review, a somewhat impromptu affair held in the autumn of 1844.

The first incident in the chain was the publication, in May 1844, of a pamphlet entitled *Notes sur l'état des forces navales de la France*, written by the Prince de Joinville (son of the French king, Louis Philippe). The object of this publication was to draw to the notice of the French public the inadequate state of their navy and how Britain's naval power might be lessened. The use of steamers, he argued, would avoid the need for skilled seamen, so important in a sailing ship, and would favour bold and imaginative warfare.[34] The fact that Britain, unlike France, possessed an abundance of good quality coal and iron ore, and the industrial capacity to exploit it, seems to have been ignored by Joinville. Ironically at this time, too, France possessed more seasoned wood for building ships-of-the-line than Britain. On its own, Joinville's pamphlet might not have seriously harmed Anglo-French relations, but in June the visit of the Tsar to Britain was seen to be provocative by a France which had vivid memories of Anglo-Russian co-operation in Syria still fresh on her mind. The attempts of the British Government to dissuade France from embarking on a campaign in Morocco thereafter fell on deaf ears. Joinville began hostilities against Morocco in August supported by an impressive naval force, including steamers. To make things worse George Pritchard, the British Consul and local Protestant missionary who had been incarcerated on the island of Tahiti the previous year by a French naval officer, returned to Britain in the summer of 1844, adding fuel to the public anger with France. But France was in no mood for retreat this time. Having conceded British claims in New Zealand, this proud nation was determined to extend its influence in North Africa. By way of appeasement, however, compensation was awarded to Pritchard by the French Government and war was narrowly avoided, leaving behind instead a legacy of fear of invasion in Britain and bitterness in France. 'The visit of Louis Philippe to Windsor in October and his decoration with the Garter dispelled some of the summer storm clouds',[35] but there were still many Frenchmen who would have agreed with the *National's* appraisal of events:

> It is France which has been sacrificed to prepare the King's journey, and it is France which will be insulted during his stay.[36]

Be that as it may, one person had reason to be highly delighted by the prospect of the French King's visit. His name was John Christian Schetky, a man of Hungarian antecedents who was born in Edinburgh and knew Burns, Scott, William Stanfield and many more prominent men of his time. His chief claim to fame, however, as far as this paper is concerned, is that for twenty-five years he was Professor of Drawing at the Royal Naval College in Portsmouth, until that institution was dissolved in 1837. Whilst holding this post Schetky established a life-long association with the Royal Family. In 1844 he was appointed Marine Painter in Ordinary to Queen Victoria (a post he had formerly held under the two previous monarchs). The visit of Louis Philippe thus provided Schetky, at the age of sixty-six, with a timely opportunity to fulfil a number of lucrative commissions to help him support his family. A letter, written to his eldest daughter at the time, conveys all the magic and excitement of the occasion:

> At six [a.m.] . . . all the inhabitants of Portsmouth were astonished, as I was, to hear a continual roar of great guns! So up I jumped (and many thousands more), assured by such a manifestation that the king

of the French was close at hand. I therefore got into my boat and crossed the harbour to Blockhouse Fort and took up my station for sketching this extraordinary arrival. It was very cold and misty, and I could see nothing except many boats pulling out to meet the illustrious visitor; so after standing there on the beach all alone for some time (like a fool!) I went back to a comfortable breakfast at my hotel (the Quebec). Then about nine o' clock the cry was 'he's coming'. I instantly returned to my post, and made my first sketch of his distant appearance – another just as he entered the harbour – and another as he was passing up to the moorings . . . I then went on board the royal yacht *Victoria and Albert* and sketched during the day; and as we lay near the *Gomer* (the French royal yacht), I had a good view of all that passed – thousands of boats round the ship, all having flags and all cheering like madmen. And when Prince Albert with the Duke of Wellington came in the royal barge to go on board and welcome the King, the yell of delight was overpowering.[37]

Whether it was entirely diplomatic at such a period of sensitivity in Anglo-French relations for the victor of Waterloo to welcome the King of the French to our shores is debatable, even if he was the Lord Lieutenant of the County!

After a week of festivities the King intended leaving England as he came, by way of Portsmouth. Unfortunately, when he arrived there on the 14th the weather was so unfavourable that he was obliged to retrace his steps and return home via Dover instead. This change to the scheduled plan was a bitter disappointment for the French squadron anchored at Spithead, and to compensate, the Queen and Prince Albert (who spent the night at Portsmouth on board the royal yacht) resolved to inspect the visiting warships the next day on their way to Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.

According to the *Times* reporter, 'the scene at Spithead as the Royal yacht neared the fleet there anchored was one never to be erased from the memory of those who beheld it'.[38] The fine display of warships comprised on the British side, three line-of-battle ships, a squadron of eight experimental gun-brigs and two small paddle steamers, the *Volcano* and *Comet*. The French squadron was composed of a line-of-battle ship, a frigate, two sailing yachts and four steamers.

All the ships were dressed overall, and as the Queen approached in her new steam yacht, *Victoria and Albert*,[39] the yards were manned and the traditional 21-gun salute given. It was in the latter courtesy that the French ships greatly impressed British naval officers, and the *Nautical Magazine* conceded:

> It was, in truth, to the French ships of war that the scene on that occasion owed its peculiar splendour; and especially to their manner of saluting, which

*Queen Victoria's Farewell to the French Navy*
National Maritime Museum

threw our own proceedings in that line altogether into the shade. Disdaining the usual practice of popping off one gun at a time, singly, the Frenchmen fired whole broadsides, that is, one whole side of one deck, then the opposite, then the deck next above, and then da capo from below, at the interval usual between single guns.[40]

The most enduring impression etched onto the minds of professional observers, however, was the latent power of the French steamers present at the review, particularly the powerful paddle steamer *Gomer* which had conveyed the French king to Portsmouth and which Queen Victoria now boarded. Her Majesty was received on the quarter-deck by Vice-Admiral la Susse who accompanied his illustrious guest whilst she made a thorough inspection of the ship. The Queen was evidently impressed by the capacious deck and extreme cleanliness and order throughout the vessel, and she was as keen to see the seamen's quarters as the state apartments which were so tastefully decorated. The visit was concluded with breakfast in the state cabin, to which senior officers of both squadrons had been invited. During this meal Her Majesty much admired some cakes made for the banquet which it was anticipated would have taken place on Monday, prior to Louis Philippe's departure, had not atrocious weather intervened, causing a change of plan. The French Admiral naturally requested Queen Victoria to accept some of the cakes which were subsequently transferred to the English royal yacht by the coxswain of the *Pluton*:

> When he arrived on deck, Her Majesty happened to be standing there alone . . . The coxswain not having . . . the least conception that the plainly-dressed and unattended person before him was the Queen of England, was seen to walk directly up to Her Majesty and holding out his arms laden with the cakes, to request her (his own words could not have said it more plainly than his actions did) to take charge of them. Her Majesty was seen to laugh at the man's mistake, and Prince Albert who came up immediately after, also joined in the laugh very heartily, after which [he] kindly directed the man where to go with his burden.[41]

After this amusing faux pas the *Victoria and Albert* steamed through the fleet and landed its royal passengers at Cowes. So concluded the state visit of Louis Philippe, about whom Queen Victoria wrote:

> What numbers of emotions and thoughts must fill his breast on coming here! He is the first King of France who comes on a visit to the Sovereign of this country.[42]

His reign was to come to an abrupt end four years later when revolution forced him to abdicate and take refuge in England.

Two days after Louis Philippe's departure the Queen remarked in a letter to her uncle, the King of the Belgians, that she thought the visit could only do the greatest good.[43] She had observed how well the officers of both navies got on with each other, being on the best terms, and was most impressed by the King, whose company she would miss. Unfortunately, although the heads of state were on the very best of terms, feeling at grass roots level in both countries, as has been mentioned, was one of deep mistrust and resentment. There was a genuine fear in England that France might launch a sudden attack on the country with a powerful force of steamers when the British Isles were defenceless owing to overseas commitments and years of neglect of the navy. Indeed, that summer there were only nine capital ships in commission. It was clear to the most parsimonious politicians that national defence was seriously compromised. The Conservative Government of the day had in fact injected more money into the Naval Service, and the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, asked his First Lord of the Admiralty to explain why it was, that with more money and men, there were actually fewer ships of-the-line in commission! Haddington indicated that the discrepancy was the result of developing costly steam vessels and the prolonged effect of the previous government's economies which had been concealed by greatly reducing ships' crews.[44]

**1845**

On the eve of the next Spithead review the following year, Sir Charles Napier recalled that he had seen the *Gomer* at Portsmouth and she was considerably larger than the *Terrible*, the largest paddle frigate built for the Royal Navy. 'With what facility' he argued 'might not France embark 2,000 men on board one of these large steamers, which would enable her in twenty such vessels to convey a force of 40,000 men in all across the Channel!'[45] It was amidst speculation of this kind that Napier's colleague, Palmerston, was to make his classic remark 'Steam navigation has rendered that which was before impassable by a military force nothing more than a river passable by a steam bridge'.[46]

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that 1845 found Britain in an anxious mood. Confidence was lacking in the power of the navy alone to defend the home shores, and everyone spoke of a need for harbours of refuge, fortifications,

a re-constituted militia and more steam warships. Yet how was the Admiralty likely to respond to the additional demands placed upon it when men of drive, initiative and technical skill found their path to promotion blocked by old men with outdated views? Writing in the 1890s of his experience of naval administration at this crucial time, Sir John Briggs, Reader to their Lordships and Chief Clerk of the Admiralty for forty-four years, observed:

> In the present day all the heads of the profession are in favour of progressive improvements. It was far otherwise forty or fifty years ago, when lords of the Admiralty, and Commanders-in-chief at the ports, were from seventy to upwards of eighty years of age. Consequently it would be unreasonable to expect that science, steam and gunnery in its high development, were likely to be estimated at their proper value by these officers. Seamanship, in the opinion of the profession, was everything . . .[47]

If one adds to this prejudice the party political interests of the 1840s, and the patronage bestowed by leading naval families, several conflicting forces will be seen to have motivated decisions at all levels. It is against such a complex background that the review of the Experimental Squadron by the Queen in the summer of 1845 must be discussed.

The Experimental Squadron had been formed to compare the sailing qualities of various warships, and to afford the opportunity in peace time for exercises in naval tactics. Such a desire had been the Government's aim for some time, but its intentions had been frustrated hitherto because of the demand for ships on distant stations. The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, aided by economic recovery, was now able to sanction the additional cost of such a squadron. But, as half the ships selected to form the Experimental Squadron had been designed by the Surveyor of the Navy, Sir William Symonds, considerable controversy focused on the forthcoming trials, and not simply for sound technical reasons.

Symonds, as has been mentioned, became Surveyor in 1832, following the abolition of the Navy Board, when, for the first time the post was filled by a naval officer. This, as Symonds' biographer has pointed out 'offended two classes of persons, the Master Shipwrights in the dockyards, who for generations had been accustomed to look forward to that place as their own in right of succession, and the educated theorists of the School of Naval Architecture, who expected (with some reason) to obtain it in virtue of promises formerly held out to them.'[48] The latter had the additional grievance that the School of Naval Architecture in Portsmouth had been closed by the previous Whig Administration in 1832. Whilst having no interest in politics himself, Symonds was identified by his rivals and enemies with the reform party, which at that time was sweeping all before it. Reactionaries of every description were quick to find fault with the new Surveyor, whose views on shipbuilding contradicted the prevailing ossified doctrines. Symonds insisted that he should be given a free hand to apply his own principles of ship construction, an advantage denied to his predecessors in that post, and one of which he took full advantage. This to some extent explains the success of the Surveyor's designs, and accounts in part too for the resentment of others in the profession.

One of Symonds' first initiatives in office was to recommend on grounds of economy the abolition of task and job work, day pay being substituted.[49] It was not that the men in the dockyards were failing to work fast enough. On the contrary more work was done in a given time under the old system, but the waste of materials which it occasioned gave cause for concern. It is interesting, therefore, to note Laing's observation that as late as the 1840s in Portsmouth Dockyard it was still necessary if a ship needed a speedy completion to revert to task and job pay.[50] Symonds reorganised skilled hands in the dockyard too, putting them into three (afterwards two) classes. Both measures were bitterly resented, as was his standardisation of ship fittings alluded to earlier. Some of Symonds' reforms were of course modifications to the pioneering work of Sir Robert Seppings, but a distinctive characteristic of his ships was the use of a triangular hull form which made his vessels fast and weatherly sailing ships. Unfortunately, the price paid for these qualities was high. One of Symonds' critics, John Fincham (Master Shipwright, Portsmouth Dockyard 1844–1852), argued that the merits of his ships were achieved at the expense of a quickness and extent in rolling. Whilst this would not, he admitted, interfere with the operation of the guns under a press of sail, the need to reduce sails when going into action would have rendered the use of the guns uncertain.[51] Such a defect was a serious flaw in a vessel constructed primarily for fighting. Fincham's views must, however, be set against the fact that, as a former member of the School of Naval Architecture and a shipwright, he would not have been favourably disposed towards the Surveyor's principles of ship construction. Fincham was a member of the Committee of Reference which condemned Symonds' system, yet he designed the *Raleigh*, which Symonds' biographer tells us was a pirated copy of the Surveyor's *Vernon*.[52] The Committee of Reference also included another Master Shipwright, and Dr James Inman, Professor of Mathematics at the Naval College in Portsmouth. The latter institution had started life as the Naval Academy in 1729. In 1806 it

changed its name to the Royal Naval College, and in 1816 the School of Naval Architecture, which had commenced four years earlier, was incorporated with the Naval College. The College closed as a school for boys in 1837 and with its closure went Inman. This gentleman had been instrumental in teaching the boys at the School of Naval Architecture and he must have viewed with dismay the disappearance of both institutions.

Whatever the rights and wrongs were in the dispute over the Surveyor's design concept he undoubtedly gave an impetus to the improvement of ship construction in Britain. It would seem with hindsight that a fundamental issue in the controversy over his ships was whether one should adopt a scientific or an empirical approach to problems. The opinions of the opposing sides became inextricably mixed up with party politics and personal grievances so that it was difficult to separate truth from fiction! Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in a middle ground. There was in short a need to combine theory with practice and to share the responsibility for future construction between men of varying and different skills. This is what ultimately transpired when the Surveyor retired, but the period of Sir William Symonds' years in office left a legacy of bitterness which took many years to overcome. He was criticised so vehemently and so often that his contemporaries soon came to believe that there must be some truth in his rivals' claims. As Sir James Graham once remarked:

> Excepting on matters of religion, he did not know that any difference of opinion had been attended with so much bitterness – so much anger – so much resentment – as this question with regard to the merits of Captain Symonds, and the virtues of his ships.[53]

When the Whigs left office in 1841, the Surveyor's opponents looked for Tory support in the shape of the First Sea Lord, Sir George Cockburn, about whom Briggs wrote: 'I was incapable of understanding how anyone possessing such a powerful intellect, high attainment, worldly and professional experience as Sir George, could allow political feeling and personal prejudice to so completely blind his naturally sound judgement . . . Almost every opinion he expressed, every measure he devised, and every step he took, were retrograde in their tendencies'.[54] This assessment may be exaggerated but it serves to remind us that at this crucial period of technical change, personalities played a significant part. Indeed, Symonds was quite capable of obstinacy himself when it came to defending his sacrosanct principle of great breadth of beam at or near the water-line, with a 'fine entry' and a clear 'run'. He also had no liking for steam, and the designs of his vessels did not lend themselves to the new technology.[55] It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in 1845, when the navy was under close public and professional scrutiny, the Experimental Squadron (composed as it was of so many Symondite constructions) should have become the subject of so much debate.[56]

The *Times* rightly criticised the undue partiality shown towards the Surveyor in the composition of the squadron, and the *Hampshire Advertiser* summed up many peoples' feelings when it exclaimed:

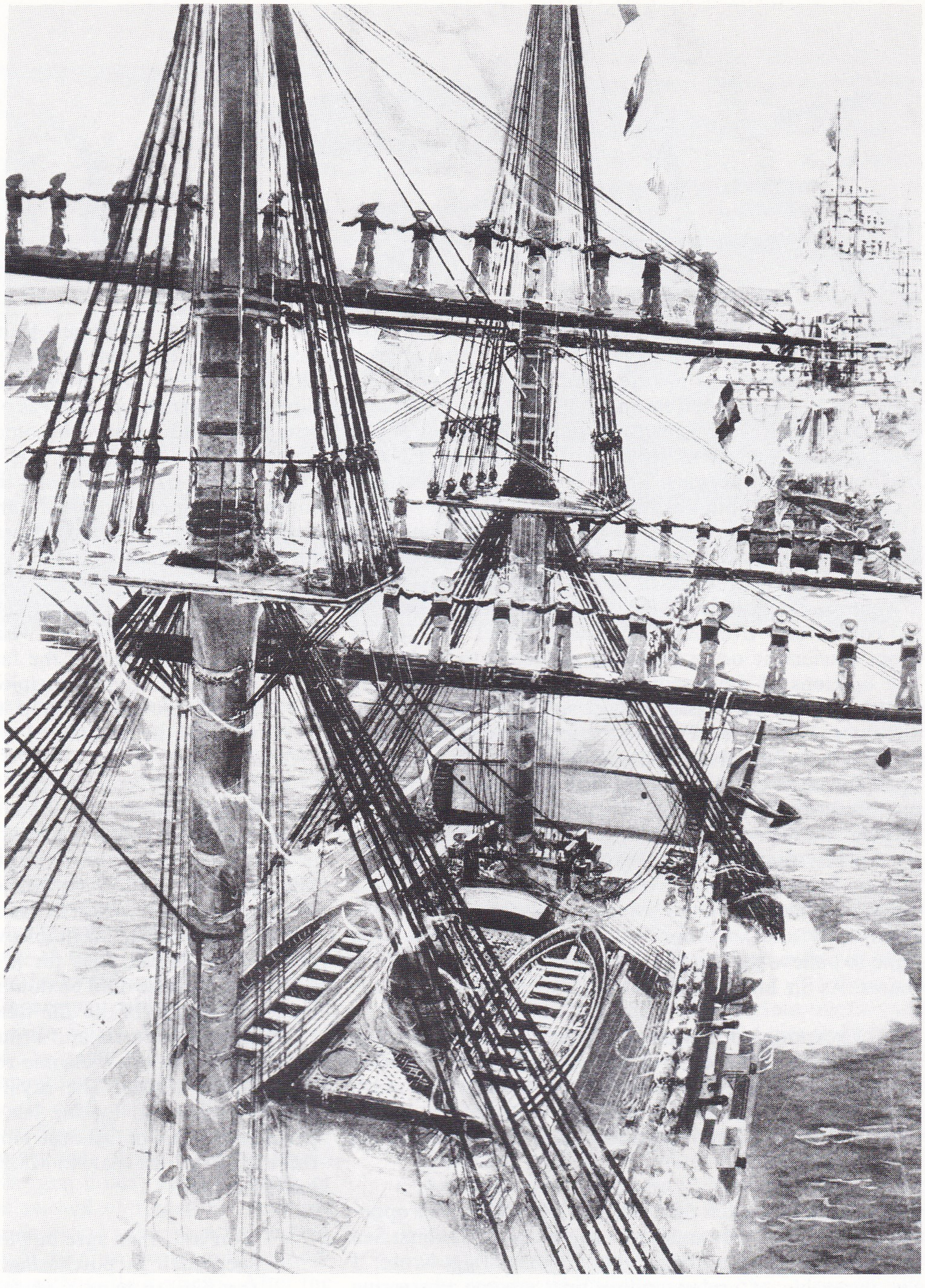
> . . . in point of naval construction, we are as far behind perfection as when the *Victory* was built. How humiliating is the fact, that in 1845 we are so deficient in right principles upon ship-building, that squadrons are required to be sent out to decide which is the best model to construct upon.[57]

Yet for all the controversy, the formation of the Experimental Squadron was a memorable occasion to lovers of the sailing navy, and it is hard to imagine from a glimpse of contemporary accounts of the naval inspections of this fine squadron that these immense wooden walls were shortly to become obsolete. Ironically, within a very short space of time all the disputes over what should or should not be the correct lines for a sailing warship would be academic: steam would be dominant. After 1845, no more pure sailing ships of the line were built.[58]

For Queen Victoria and Prince Albert the visits to the Fleet in 1845 were a welcome relief from the pressures of their official duties. The royal couple had developed a special attachment for the Isle of Wight, and they were particularly fond of Osborne House which they had rented there the previous year. In March the Queen informed her uncle Leopold:

> You will, I am sure be pleased to hear that we have succeeded in purchasing 'Osborne' . . . It sounds too nice to have a place of one's own, quiet and retired, and free from all woods and forests, and other charming departments who really are the plague of one's life.[59]

Henceforward the royal link with Spithead (Osborne's ornamental lake) would grow. Already, a railway line from Gosport station to the Clarence Victualling Yard was under construction for the convenience of the Queen, who would in future be able to transfer directly from royal train to royal yacht on her way to Osborne. However in June, when the Queen came down to review the Experimental Squadron, she was obliged to travel by coach from Gosport railway terminus to the jetty.



An inspection and review of the whole squadron took place on the morning of 21 June, when, following the customary 21-gun salute, the yards were manned and the ships instantly dressed with flags. The *Hampshire Advertiser* estimated that as the royal yacht approached the squadron 'there could not have been fewer than 20,000 persons on the water at Spithead; the steam-packets were crowded with well dressed persons, and the yachts mustered in large numbers.'[60] It was a splendid sight which must have pleased Schetky, who was commanded to attend the festivities in his official capacity as Marine Painter to the Queen.

On this occasion Queen Victoria transferred to the royal barge, escorted by a barge from each ship in the Experimental Squadron, in order to visit three of the warships anchored at Spithead. First she was rowed to the flag-ship the *St Vincent*, where she was received by Rear-Admiral Hyde Parker, Captain Rowley and the principal officers of the ship. Next she visited the *Trafalgar*, a 120-gun ship launched at Woolwich in 1841. Finally, Her Majesty boarded the *Albion*, under the command of Captain Nicholas Lockyer. This Symondite vessel (the largest two-decker sailing warship built for the navy) had been exceedingly well prepared, even to the extent of being

*The Wooden Walls of England: the Great Naval Review at Spithead in 1856*
Illustrated London News

lined with blue velvet along the side ropes and ladders. The Queen and Prince Albert expressed in the warmest terms how delighted they were with all that they had seen. Unfortunately the effect from the point of view of their Lordships of the Admiralty was somewhat marred when, upon being asked by the Queen if he had a good ship's company, Captain Lockyer unexpectedly replied:

> 'I had a good ship's company' . . . laying strong emphasis on the word 'had'. '*Had* a good ship's company?' rejoined Her Majesty, turning to the Earl of Haddington, as if for an explanation; but, as the venerable chief of the Admiralty Board did not vouchsafe any explanation, the undaunted Lockyer concluded, 'Yes, may it please your Majesty, I had a good ship's company until it pleased their Lordships of the Admiralty to take away from me one hundred of my best men'.[61]

The incident highlights only too clearly the ever present problem which successive Boards of Admiralty faced at that time-a shortage of men to man the ships of the Royal Navy. There was in particular a dearth of able seamen, the deficiency being made up to some extent by general service men from the dockyards. But these men lacked experience and could not easily be induced to join their ships despite being contracted to do so should the necessity arise. Sixty-four dockyard riggers in the Portsmouth Yard had been ordered to prepare themselves to join the Experimental Squadron and were discharged for that purpose, receiving their arrears of wages. Less than half had turned up by the prescribed date, simply because they did not like the service.[62] The *Times* announced that Admiral Sir Charles Rowley had placed a notice on the dockyard gates inviting recently paid off seamen to enlist again, with the promise of six weeks paid leave of absence. That newspaper doubted whether the ploy would induce many takers of the bait.[63] Small wonder that Captain Lockyer should have been so annoyed to find so many of his best men taken from him!

There may, however, have been a further frustration which accounted for Lockyer's indiscretion in front of their Lordships. In spite of being an excellent officer and an experienced seaman he had been a post captain since 1815. His path to promotion had been blocked by the inflated *Navy List* mentioned at the beginning of this paper, and he had only once been given command of a line-of-battle ship in all that time.[64] There had been talk in the professional journals of easing the problem by a major series of naval retirements from the list, but at this time nothing had transpired. In spite of the little *contretemps* involving Captain Lockyer the royal visit to the Experimental Squadron was a great success.

If Saturday's proceedings were a success they were surpassed in magnificence by the following Monday's display. This could possibly be attributed to the fact that handbills were circulated for several days previously, stating that a full-scale review would take place on that day.[65] Accordingly, vast crowds congregated on the ramparts and fortifications of Portsmouth and Gosport, only to be disappointed at learning that instead of weighing anchor and performing some interesting evolutions (the necessary constituents for a review in the opinion of the *Morning Chronicle*)[66] the ships would remain stationary and give a demonstration of making and furling sail. Only the *Superb* was to be allowed to exhibit her sailing qualities. Despite the disappointment occasioned by the cancellation of manoeuvres, the public appeared to be well pleased with events:

> The beach of Southsea Common, from the King's Rooms to Southsea Castle, was literally covered with a dense mass of people and every steam boat was in requisition, and made a good day's work by taking people out at 2*s*. per head to Spithead.[67]

Hundreds of yachts followed the *Superb* as she sailed out some twelve or fifteen miles from Spithead accompanied by the royal yacht, and Queen Victoria was so delighted with this 80-gun second-rate Symondite warship that when it returned to its anchorage she sent instructions to Schetky to sketch it immediately.

> So I went to work, and Prince Albert came and looked on, saying, 'I think the *Superb* sits very well for you – I do not think any lady could sit better'. Before I had finished my sketch the Queen sent to know it it was done; and I found out afterwards that her impatience to see it was because Her Majesty was making a sketch of the same ship at the same time that she desired me to do it, and wished to compare them.[68]

The incident is instructive since it reveals both the competitive side of the Queen's personality and her undoubted skill at draughtsmanship.

Three weeks later Her Majesty returned to Spithead, accompanied by the Dowager Queen Adelaide, Prince Albert, King Leopold of the Belgians and his Queen, Prince George of Cambridge, the Duchess of Saxe Weimar and five Dukes, this time to witness the departure of the Experimental Squadron for its cruise in the Bay of Biscay. Owing to the presence of so many distinguished guests and the greater interest aroused by the prospect of a

fleet weighing anchor, the departure of the Experimental Squadron was a greater success as a nautical pageant than its two predecessors.

The *Times* reporter was clearly in a whimsical mood and his pen beautifully conveyed to readers in almost Dickensian caricature, the atmosphere of hustle and bustle as one crowded steamer after another tried to demonstrate its loyalty to the royal family. He added this reprimand however:

> It is to be regretted . . . that in some cases the Captains were more anxious to give their passengers an opportunity of demonstrating their loyalty than of consulting the convenience of those whom they intended to compliment – occasionally running their vessels so near as to interfere somewhat with the motions of the Royal Yacht, or when to windward favouring those on board with a full taste of their quality in the production of smoke.[69]

What the reporter said of the Belgian flag needs no embellishment:

> Soon after the Royal Standard had displayed its well-known blazonry at the main of the Royal Yacht, a mass of gaudy bunting swaggered up to the fore, where it hung for some time before it was made out . . . to be the Belgian tricolor Royal.[70]

The succeeding trials appeared to vindicate the Surveyor's ships, and his reputation was temporarily restored. Sir James Graham, after the success of the initial evolutions under Rear Admiral Hyde Parker, wrote to the Surveyor congratulating him:

> . . . to be abused is the common lot of all public servants who have risen to high stations; but their abuse is, I trust, no proof of demerit; it proceeds rather from jealousy and conscious inferiority. Your works will speak for themselves; and, come what may, you have given an impulse to the improved construction of ships, which no intrigue or ill-will can arrest.[71]

Rear Admiral Pym who succeeded Parker after the first cruise (the latter resigning owing to ill-health) was as impressed as his predecessor had been, with the performance of HMS *Queen*, which Symondite construction had recently been criticised by Sir Charles Napier in the House of Commons. In his final report to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, Pym had no hesitation in stating that 'nothing could be more easy in all the trials than the *Queen* and *Albion*, who never appeared to strain anything . . . the *Queen* is the best ship, the *Albion* and *Rodney* next'.[72]

Unfortunately the Surveyor's triumph was short-lived, and the reason was apparent to astute observers who witnessed the departure of the Experimental Squadron in July:

> Among the large fleet of steam and sailing vessels cruising at Spithead on this occasion, one which attracted a considerable degree of attention, was a smart yachtish-looking craft called the *Waterlilly* . . . Her great speed led us to suspect that she was more than a sailing vessel, and a shift of her course confirmed our suspicions, by exposing from behind her white canvas that unsightly appendage to steam vessels – a chimney . . . The *Waterlilly* belongs to Maudslays, the engineers, and is fitted by them with a pair of 25 horse direct acting engines, and a screw propeller.[73]

It was this latter novelty which was to revolutionise shipbuilding, for the adoption of the screw in the Royal Navy meant ultimately that even ships-of-the-line would become steamers. Unlike paddle-wheels, which reduced the fire power of warships by occupying valuable space on the broadsides, the screw did not interfere with the traditional qualities of a man-of-war, but added the auxiliary capacity to sail in any direction, regardless of wind and tide. A further advantage of the screw was that it enabled the engine and boilers to be placed well below the water-line, unlike paddle steamers, whose machinery was dangerously but unavoidably exposed to enemy fire. As if to prove conclusively the superiority of the screw over the paddle-wheel, HMS *Rattler* (screw) when lashed to the stern of HMS *Alecto* (paddles) on 3 April 1845, succeeded in towing the latter at 2.7 knots when both vessels were working their engines at full speed.[74]

The tactical value which the screw conferred on warships was not lost to the French, but it was Great Britain which took the lead in fitting screws to capital ships.[75] Whilst it is true that these first steam battleships were originally conceived as blockships intended for harbour and coastal defence, it was decided in 1845 that they should be seagoing, and the success of the *Blenheim* after modifications was a contributory factor in speeding up the Admiralty's decision to convert other ships of-the-line to steam. Not that the transition to screw-steamers was easy or without its opponents, as Brock and Greenhill have indicated:

> The screw introduced problems in both engineering and ship design, and it is interesting to find Admiral

Sir George Cockburn, represented by Briggs as the arch-enemy of progress, writing in 1844; 'as soon as we shall have decided on the best shape and the best propeller, we shall certainly advance our number of steam warships as fast, if not faster, than [the French] can; and we have already many plans for keeping the machinery below the water'.[76]

The Admiralty's problems were not simply technical. The advances in steam propulsion necessitated a new breed of dockyard employee, the engineer, who had to work with traditionally trained shipwrights. This, as one might expect in a new field without an established place in the existing scheme of things, could lead to friction. Laing has shown that at Portsmouth there was some evidence of this in the relationship between Master Shipwright John Fincham and the Chief Engineer, Andrew Murray.[77]

In spite of the obstacles the Admiralty was true to its word, and by the time that Queen Victoria returned to Portsmouth for the next naval review in 1853, it was to be a very different fleet which she inspected.

**1853**

From a tentative start on the four block-ships fitted with screws as part of a recommendation by the 1844 Commission on Coast Defences, the navy had by 1853 made great strides. According to Bartlett 'At the beginning of 1851, apart from the four block-ships, there were four screw ships of the line upon the *Navy List*. Another two were soon added, and in October 1852, the laying down or conversion of no less than six more such ships was ordered. France possessed only four afloat and under construction by the end of 1852, so that it was not surprising that such an air of confidence and pride attended the Spithead review of August 1853'.[78]

The cause of all this activity had been fear of French naval ambition. The seeds of suspicion were sown in the 1830s and accelerated after the first invasion scare of 1844, but grew even stronger in 1848 following the supplanting of Louis Philippe by Republicans and the national election of Louis Napoléon (whose name alone conjured up the worst fears in British minds) as President of France. When Napoléon carried out his coup d'état in 1851 a further scare was launched, accentuated by his being proclaimed ruler of the French Empire in December 1852. Once more Europe seemed to be on the verge of war. War there would be, but it was not to be with France. The fleet which assembled at Spithead in the summer of 1853 was the product of years of Anglo-French rivalry. Yet paradoxically this efficient war machine was to be allied to France in a war against Russia, and the imposing spectacle at Spithead was not intended for the edification of the Emperor of the French but as a warning to Tsar Nicholas that whilst Britain desired peace she had the means to wage war most effectively.

Ostensibly, the cause of what was to become known as the Crimean War was a dispute between Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox Christians in Palestine. This was used by Russia, posing as 'protector' of orthodox christian rights, as a pretext to invade the Turkish Danubian provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia. Such blatant expansionism, if left unchecked, would have spread Russian influence too near to the Eastern Mediterranean for Britain's comfort. The Western powers preferred a weak Turkey propped up by them to any Russian solution to the Eastern Question. An attempt to settle the dispute by the 'Vienna Note' seemed to have succeeded when it was approved by Russia on 3 August, shortly before the Spithead review. Turkish objections to certain clauses in the 'Vienna Note' were not raised until 19 August, so it was in a mood of optimism and conciliatory gestures that the people of Britain approached the Spithead review.

The 'Grand Naval Review' of Thursday 11 August 1853 was a milestone. For the first time provision was made for members of both Houses of Parliament to attend a naval review, and for the first time representatives of the press were invited. The review also marked the first appearance of semaphore on board ship, when one was fitted on the taffrails of the steamers to assist in keeping station.[79] Railways now linked the Capital with Portsmouth, enabling thousands to attend the review who formerly would have been prevented from doing so. This meant that accommodation was at a premium. The *Morning Post* informed its readers that 'one canny housewife . . . scraped together about a score windsor chairs which she placed carefully round a good-sized apartment, and let rapidly at five shillings a head'.[80] Above all, there was a new public interest in everything that pertained to the navy of Great Britain, 'for honest John Bull naturally said to himself, "I help to pay for that, and have some degree of interest in what I am called upon to contribute towards"'.[81] With such sentiments in mind *Punch* could not be expected to resist the opportunity afforded by the naval review to poke fun at the Government:

> Before me was an enormous volume of smoke, which completely prevented me from seeing the vessels; it was however, a volume in which I think I read something to the purpose . . . The boom of each brobdingnagian piece of ordnance inspired me with a sum in mental arithmetic, which the immediate thunder of another explosion prevented me from carrying out with strict accuracy. The problem

*Grand Naval Review at Spithead 11 August 1853*
Portsmouth City Museum

however, was simple enough. So much noise, so much gunpowder, so much money. So much money; so much taxation . . . Bang! There goes the Income Tax. Bang! That's the Succession Duty. Bang! Bang! That's the Stamp and Paper Duties . . . All this money gone in fire and smoke? Not so – the greater part of it, doubtless, in national defence and Peace Assurance . . . Of course it is necessary to a certain extent, to discharge small arms and to fire broadsides at nothing. But . . . it may be a useful exercise for the mind of the spectator . . . to count the cost of the cartridges, and compute the dimensions of the hole which they blow into our pocket.[82]

In spite of *Punch*'s flippant satire, most newspapers saw that beyond the royal salutes and bunting the review could be considered a great pacifier. Only the *Morning Advertiser* (affectionately known as 'Old Tiser') seems to have been genuinely sceptical, by asking

> Where is the utility of such maritime displays? . . . Some men are so happily constituted, that they can not only find sermons in stones, and good in everything, but can educe the greatest good from the greatest seeming evil . . . The blowing up of one of his ships of war by our squadron, would have had a twenty times greater effect on the mind of . . . the Czar, than a thousand such displays as was yesterday witnessed at Spithead.[83]

Strong words indeed, but the prevailing feeling in Fleet Street and the Strand was that Britain, after years of self-doubt in the ability of the nation to defend itself, was now custodian of a mighty engine of destruction which would render war obsolete, or at least place Britain in an unassailable position, and the world should know this.

The *Times* preferred to regard the review as a symbol of Empire rather than a demonstration of progress in naval architecture, adding (no doubt as a warning to St Petersburg) that 'If foreign Governments imagined the martial spirit of this country to have declined, they were egregiously mistaken'.[84] To those in the 'Peace Movement' who denigrated the warlike appearance of the fleet at Spithead, the *Morning Post* replied, 'He who employs watchmen to guard his premises cannot be said to take up a position of offence but rather of precaution',[85] whilst the *Sun* gave the sound injunction which probably epitomised the nation's feelings at this time: *'si vis pacem para bellum'*.[86]

Leaving aside the political implications of the review the *Times* was right to see the occasion as a great national event. Not only was the royal family present[87] with its guests, and both Houses of Parliament, but ministers of the crown, the diplomatic corps, many distinguished army and navy officers, eminent civilians, numerous officials, vessels from yachting clubs, and a long train of attendant steamers packed with excursionists eagerly attended. From abroad came Prince William of Prussia, the Duke of Mecklenburg, the Crown Prince of Wurtemberg, Prince Don Juan of Spain and many others.[88] To complete the splendour of the occasion the spectacle was favoured with magnificent weather.

Amongst the vast number of distinguished foreign visitors was the Saxon Minister to the Court of St James, Count Charles Frederick Vitzthum von Eckstaedt, who fortunately left behind in his memoirs a personal recollection of the proceedings as witnessed from the Admiralty's yacht *Black Eagle*. Describing the sham fight which took place some miles out from Spithead, the Count recalled that

> The leading idea was the defence of Portsmouth harbour against an enemy's fleet, whose advance guard consisting of three English sailing ships of the line, was signalled some miles from the harbour. The steam flotilla was put in motion at a preconcerted signal from the flagship; then, headed by the Royal Yacht, advanced to meet the three attacking vessels, and, forming line abreast, cannonaded them, with the result that they were soon supposed to be crippled and disabled from action. The captain of our steamer had indulged himself by exposing his craft to a broadside from the *Duke of Wellington*. Seventy-five guns of the heaviest calibre at close quarters caused such a deafening hubbub, and the gunpowder such a blinding darkness, that for some minutes we could literally neither hear nor see.[89]

The lesson of the mock engagement could not have been lost on those who witnessed it, but as if to reinforce the point, all vessels were ordered to chase to the south in order to emphasise the superiority of the screw warships *Impérieuse, Agamemnon* and *Duke of Wellington* over the sailing ships and paddle-steamers. All vessels were then commanded to return to Spithead as best they could, which naturally meant that once again the sailing ships struggled up the anchorage long after everyone else and only just in time to see the closing shots of the boat attack on two steamers which had taken up a position 'broadside on' within a mile of Southsea beach.

There was a didactic quality about this concluding tableau too, for the *United Service Gazette*[90] informs us that the two steamers represented an enemy which was presumed previously to have disembarked troops. The speedy

destruction of these vessels was no doubt intended as a salutory warning to any would-be aggressor and an assurance to all at home that the navy was quite capable of handling any sudden invasion. It was precisely the sort of incident which was calculated to appeal to the additional 100,000 visitors who flocked into Portsmouth for the day. In one confined space congregated the Channel Squadron of 25 ships which the Queen had reviewed, an equal number of Government steamers which had been appropriated to carry official guests, numerous private steamers and hundreds of sailing vessels of every description:[91]

> Everything that could float and move by sail or oar . . . was on the waters floating about, so as to shut out the face of the waves beneath a shifting veil of rope and wood and canvas. The Royal Yacht, beset with them like a Queen Bee by its loving subjects, floated tranquilly, the centre of innumerable lorgnettes and prying eyes. At intervals some very dirty and very loyal steamer came waddling along close to the *Victoria and Albert*, and discharged a volley of hearty cheers from its living cargo . . . gentlemanly yachts veiled their topsails as they came near, and ungentlemanly ones stood too close in and became objects of universal abhorrence.[92]

When the firing ceased and the enemy steamers were seen to be vanquished, Spithead resounded with a general salute to Queen Victoria; even the Platform battery joined in. And so, weary but contented, after a most successful naval review,[93] the vast crowds departed. A train carrying Members of Parliament back to London encountered some delay however, which was unfortunate because the House of Commons had resolved to sit at the unusual hour of 10.00 pm. *Hansard* informs us that insufficient members had returned to London by this time, hence the Speaker did not take the chair until half-past eleven; but this was not the real cause of delay as Sir John Mowbray later revealed:

> The first part of the train, carrying the Speaker, Lord Palmerston, and a large number of members, of whom I was one, arrived punctually. The second part carried the officer of the House, who had with him the key of the cupboard in which the mace was kept. That did not arrive until 11 pm . . . No House could be made without a mace. Inquiries were made in every quarter – in the House of Lords first and afterwards elsewhere – but no mace of any sort or kind could be obtained. Members waited for an hour in remarkable costumes, and at last the necessary business was soon transacted.[94]

And what was this vital and pressing business which kept the House sitting till 11.45 pm? – the Friendly Societies Bill, the Metropolitan Sewers Acts Continuance Bill, and the Lunatics Care and Treatment Bill!

Following the naval review, there was on the whole a feeling of self-congratulation and pride. Prince Albert wrote to Baron von Stockmar (adviser to his uncle King Leopold of Belgium) in a euphoric mood and was clearly impressed by the screw warships, especially the *Duke of Wellington*, flagship of Sir Thomas Cochrane (Commander-in-Chief of the fleet) and at that time the largest and most powerful warship in the world:[95]

> The gigantic ships of war, among them the *Duke of Wellington* with 131 guns . . . went, without sails, and propelled only by the screw, *eleven miles an hour*, and this against wind and tide! This is the greatest revolution effected in the conduct of naval warfare which has yet been known. Steam as well as sailing vessels will . . . be cast aside as useless, and men-of-war with the auxiliary screw will take their place.[96]

The attractiveness of screw-assisted wooden sailing warships which combined freedom of movement with the endurance, range and stowage capacity of traditional

*The Baltic Fleet leaving Spithead March 1854*
National Maritime Museum

warships, was hard to resist. Yet there was a weakness in these new constructions, which Bartlett, the eminent naval historian for this period, has exposed:

> They bore immense armaments, but until the introduction of the ironclad, there was no balance between their offensive and defensive qualities. Well-handled ships of the line could destroy each other in almost as many minutes as their predecessors had taken hours at Trafalgar.[97]

The Crimean War was to demonstrate that, far from having reached a stage of perfection, the Royal Navy was extremely vulnerable, and that the science of naval architecture was to be revolutionised, changes would take place in ship construction which would make the introduction of the screw (important though such a step was) seem but one link in a long chain of remarkable engineering achievements, culminating in the great and complex steel battleships of the twentieth century. Such changes would not be confined to the physical appearance of warships either, as the following perceptive passage from a contemporary issue of the *Illustrated London News* demonstrates:

> [steam] seems likely to change the whole character of the ships. They will require fewer sailors, and more gunners, engineers, and stokers. Their service will be more peculiar, and their crews must be especially trained. The separation . . . between the merchant and the Royal service . . . will become greater and more distinct . . . and impressment . . . must be as completely swept even out of the recollections of the navy, as it is universally condemned. With that must go the cruel discipline that grew from it; and the use of steam, therefore, will promote the moral improvement of the naval service.[98]

And yet for all the grand developments made possible by Britain's industrial might, there were those like Sir John Mowbray MP, who would look back on the Spithead review of 1853 with its sham fights, pell mell and small number of warships, with fond memories:

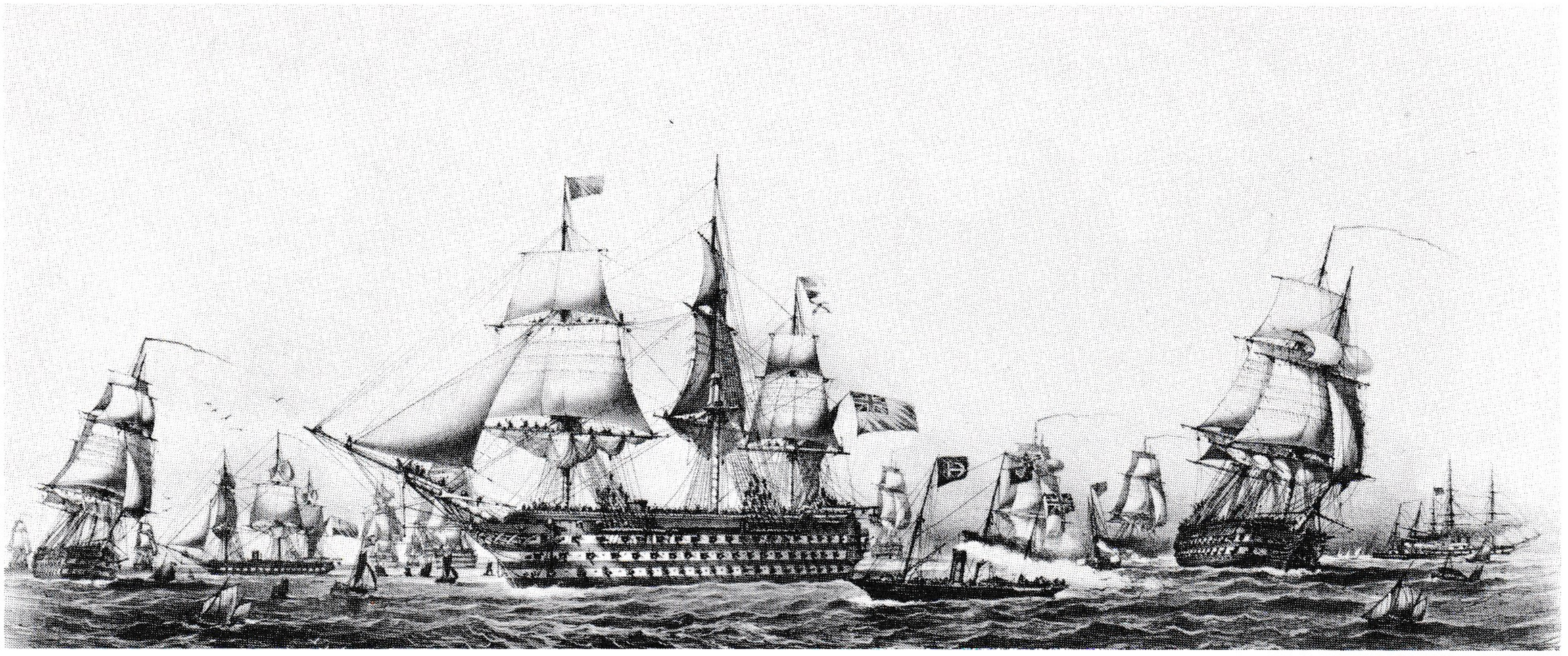
> I was present at the naval review at Spithead [in 1853]. There have been many reviews since, which I have seen; but there has never been any one equal as a spectacle to what we then witnessed. . . . It was a most exciting scene, and a great contrast to what is now exhibited when vessels carrying the spectators move slowly along the line, while the magnificent navy of great Britain remains stationary, as idle as 'a painted ship upon a painted ocean'.[99]

The latter observation brings to mind the only real disappointment associated with the 1853 naval review, or rather, its aftermath. Schetky, marine painter to Queen Victoria, happened to be present at the review, having been commissioned by the Duke of Rutland, to paint for him that summer. The sketch pad with the results of his labours was accidently left on an omnibus in London after Schetky took it to show a pupil shortly before he intended forwarding it to His Grace. Despite a lengthy search the drawings failed to turn up. The artist reproduced all the sketches from memory for the Duke who was delighted with the results. Some twelve years later the original sketch book was returned to Schetky under mysterious circumstances and with most of the leaves missing; but two very beautiful drawings of the review remained inside to be welcomed as old friends.[100]

## 1854

Much has been said of the incompetence of high command, and the poor showing of the army and navy. Forward planning appears to have escaped those who were responsible for conducting the Crimean war, and once the Russians had withdrawn from Turkish territory, the decision to destroy the important naval base of Sevastopol seems to have been taken as an after-thought and without thorough consideration of the logistical requirements. We find Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Napier warning Aberdeen's ministry as early as July 1853 of the danger of the Russian fleet in the Baltic,[101] only to find himself given command of a force which had to be prepared at Spithead in a very short space of time to meet the threat.[102] Napier knew that the difficulty was not in obtaining ships with which to fight the enemy, but skilled seamen to man them.[103] He urged the First Lord, Sir James Graham, to offer a bounty, but a mistake in the wording prevented its use, so Napier had to find nucleus crews from the Coastguard and dockyard riggers, supplemented by Scandinavians when he reached the Baltic. Such an unsatisfactory start to operations was not helped by an inadequate supply of warm clothing, and more importantly, a severe shortage of shells and gunpowder. In Napier's favour was the fact that he had screw capital ships whereas the Russians had none; but the Russian fleet was large and thought to be well trained.

The so-called 'massacre' of Sinope, whereby a Russian fleet annihilated a Turkish squadron in the opening months of war with shell guns, aroused public indignation in Britain (not yet at war), whose martial spirit was strong despite a weak and divided Government. Such weapons had been condemned when first introduced because they were regarded as inhumane. Not until 1837 were they accepted as a legitimate part of the Royal Navy, when the



pattern was established of fitting warships with a combination of long-range solid shot cannon and short-range shell guns.

By the time Britain entered the war on 28 March 1854, she had already sent the Mediterranean fleet into the Black Sea and despatched a second fleet to the Baltic to engage the enemy. The public, nurtured on the victories of Trafalgar and the Nile, expected much. The press encouraged a martial spirit, and when Napier tried to warn people not to expect too much he was considered defeatist. He had, after all, criticised the pacific policy of Aberdeen the previous October at a public meeting in London and had gone as far as to suggest that 'instead of reviewing a grand fleet at Spithead, he would have treated the Russians to the old Nelson trick in the Baltic'.[104]

The departure from Spithead on Saturday 11 March of an advance squadron of 15 warships for the Baltic, aroused great national interest:[105]

> All the world seems moving again towards Portsmouth in anticipation of a grand spectacle taking place at Spithead . . . Already is every hotel full, every house occupied, and provisions rising to famine prices. Here and there may be seen heaps of luggage piled on the pavements of the High Street . . . Not a bed or a sofa . . . is to be obtained even in the most unwelcome of localities, but at a price which few would think of paying.[106]

The fleet, which lay under the lee of the Isle of Wight, wore a serious countenance, in stark contrast to the Channel Fleet which had anchored at Spithead the summer before. This time the ships were moored closer together; no bunting was to be seen, but instead each vessel was bristling with guns and marines, presenting a formidable appearance.

Queen Victoria came down to Osborne with the express intention of bidding farewell to this contingent of the newly-constituted Baltic Fleet. She confided to Lord Aberdeen beforehand her concern for the safety of the fleet and the awesome responsibility which rested with it.[107] The memory of the departure was clearly etched on the minds of all those who witnessed it, and the celebrated author, Sir Walter Besant (a native of Portsmouth), writing atmospherically many years later, still had vivid recollections of the occasion:

> It was a fresh and breezy day in March; the sun came out in occasional gleams, and shot long arrows of light athwart the clouds. The sea was dark with multitudes of boats, yachts, steamers, and craft of all kinds; the shore was black with the thousands who sat there watching for the signal to be given. And riding at anchor lay the ships on which the fortunes of England depended . . . Presently we saw the Queen's steamer the *Fairy* . . . threading her graceful way swiftly in and out of the ships, while the Jack Tars manned the yardarms, and cheered till the shore took it up with echoes and the counter-cheering of the spectators . . . They sailed, the Queen leading the way. Out flew the white canvas, fluttering for a moment in the windy sunshine, and then, with set purpose . . . the Armada passed out of sight, and we all went home.[108]

When the Russian navy failed to come out and fight, the allies automatically assumed command of the seas. The problem was to know how best to use that power against a vast country which was self-sufficient in essential commodities. Having contained the Russian Baltic Fleet behind the walls of Kronstadt, and tied down a large Russian army in the north, the Royal Navy switched its theatre of operations to the Crimea, where the Tsar chose to defend the important naval base of Sevastopol. Against the walls of this fortress the allies attempted in vain to bombard their way to victory on 17 October 1854.

Failure to take Sevastopol before the Russian winter set in led to a protracted campaign of siege warfare. It quickly became apparent to the allies that wooden ships-of-the-line were too vulnerable to the shellfire of the Russian fortifications, whilst the allies could not move in close enough to destroy Sevastopol or indeed any other major Russian forts without shallow draught gunboats. Work in building vast numbers of these vessels began in the summer of 1854. Napier, who suggested the need for them, found that only Bomarsund could be taken without en-

dangering his fleet in the narrow approaches and shallow waters surrounding the Baltic defences. Having been advised not to launch his ships against the guns of the forts, he was replaced by high command for his failure to achieve spectacular results.

The following year revealed Britain's capacity to use her industrial might to great effect.[109] The necessary gunboats were sent to the Black Sea where they proved themselves, after the capture of Kertch on the eastern point of the Crimean peninsula, by cutting supply lines to Sevastopol in the Sea of Azov, thus hastening an end to the war. Sveaborg was successfully bombarded in August 1855, Sevastopol was taken in September and the important fortress of Kinburn was captured in October, thanks largely to the use of three French floating batteries, whose wrought-iron protection proved resistant to Russian shellfire.[110] After this series of technological victories, Russia lost the heart to continue the fight. Tsar Nicholas, who led Russia to war, had died in March 1855, and his successor, Alexander II, was clearly of a pacific disposition.[111]

At home the general mood of the country was still militant, and when it was announced in March 1856 that a naval review would take place at Spithead the following month to celebrate peace, there was a feeling that if only we had been allowed to continue the fight for a further year, what victories might we have won with these new engines of destruction!

Although the navy's role for most of the war had been confined to protecting supply lines and transporting troops, the long-term implications for maritime warfare had been clearly shown. Henceforth a continuous struggle between the power of offence (the shell gun) and the capacity for defence (armour-plating) would dictate the way naval architecture developed. After centuries of equilibrium in a ship's ability to attack, or defend itself, science would now work in alternating directions: bigger guns would lead to better armour; this in turn would lead to more powerful guns, and so on. What the Crimean war had done was to accelerate the pace of technological change.

It is unfortunate that the naval review should have been seized upon to eulogise the vast array of gunboats, which were regarded by some as a panacea for all former weaknesses in Britain's naval might. By doing so, the press of the day missed the real lesson of the war, which was that shellfire had rendered existing wooden sailing warships obsolete and reduced the effectiveness of the screw-assisted warship unless armour protection was added. Even the *Times*, which outstripped all other newspapers in circulation and prestige, gave no more than a superficial appraisal of the changes wrought by the war:

> Let any one who was present at the spectacle of yesterday pass in mental review the gunboats, the mortar boats, and floating batteries which were displayed before his eyes . . . It is difficult to imagine any fortress which would not crumble beneath the iron storm of our mortar boats, or any wall that could long resist the crushing fire of our floating batteries . . . We have now the means of waging a really offensive war, not only against fleets but harbours, fortresses, and rivers . . . It is this great change that the review of yesterday most emphatically records.[112]

Again the nation was led to believe that the navy possessed an invincible force which would overcome all obstacles in the event of war. In the same way that the auxiliary screw had been the scientific wonder of the 1853 review, so the swarm of gunboats and mortar vessels were now heralded as miracles of technology. Certainly the ability of the country to turn out vast numbers of these craft in the space of eighteen months was a testimony to the industrial might of Britain. Few would have appreciated, however, that the four floating batteries anchored in Stokes Bay during the naval review, were the ironclad predecessors of iron built armour-plated battleships which would shortly render obsolete the whole vast fleet of 240 vessels anchored at Spithead that day.[113]

And how did the *Times* describe the floating batteries which had sown the seeds of such radical change?

> Four low, flat, squat, black, unwieldy constructions . . . Their appearance inspires a doubt whether they are capable of motion . . . They were more brilliantly dressed than any other vessels in the harbour. It was in vain; beauty of form – the one thing needful for the eye of an amateur – was not there; their ugliness is irredeemable; garlands of roses would not give grace to these hippopotami.[114]

So much for the technical lessons of the Crimean war. Power there certainly was at Spithead, but had it arrived too late? Many critics of the Government asked why the gunboats had not been available sooner, and sailors were bitter that they had not played a more dynamic role during the war. John Sabben, Surgeon of the *Sphinx*, recorded in his diary the lower deck view of the war:

> Two hundred and forty-three vessels of war!
> What did we build this big fleet for?
> To go to the Black and the Baltic main
> And what did it do? It came back again!

Three thousand, one hundred and seventy-two.
What in god's name did these great guns do?
Oh, they drilled with shot, and they practised with shell,
And saluted on Wednesday wonderfully well.

Thirty-two thousand, eight hundred and ten!
What have they done – all those Englishmen?
They pottered at Sveaborg and fished in Azoff
And can man their yards without tumbling off.[115]

Behind the biting satire lay a scornful conviction that gross mismanagement had permeated the war. And perhaps it was to gloss over the mistakes of the war and to restore confidence in the navy that the decision was made to organise a magnificent showpiece spectacle at Spithead.

**1856**

People came flocking from all parts of the empire to see the great 'peace review' as it was described. Never had a naval review been conducted on so vast a scale, or generated so much interest, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Charles Wood, was determined that it should be a success.[116] So much so in fact that Sir George Seymour, the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, was obliged to remark in confidence to his son: 'By what I hear from Berkeley, Sir C. Wood has been going on too fast in all the arrangements and day for the review without consulting sufficiently naval authorities'.[117] The consequence of Sir Charles' impetuosity was that the date fixed for the review had to be changed twice before it was finally settled. The main reason for these changes seems to have been because Sir Charles, being a politician and a Civil Lord, did not appreciate the need to take into account the complex tidal conditions when deciding upon the timing of the proposed evolution at Spithead. Colonel Phipps (Prince Albert's Private Secretary) was obliged to write to the First Lord stating that the Queen was quite satisfied to have the review on the 22nd or 23rd, whichever day was more convenient, 'only Her Majesty would like to know soon which is the day for certain, as many other arrangements depend upon it'.[118] Wednesday, 23 April was eventually chosen. A Wednesday, as Sir Charles had already indicated to the Queen, was convenient because it was a day when the House of Lords did not meet and over which the Commons might easily adjourn.[119]

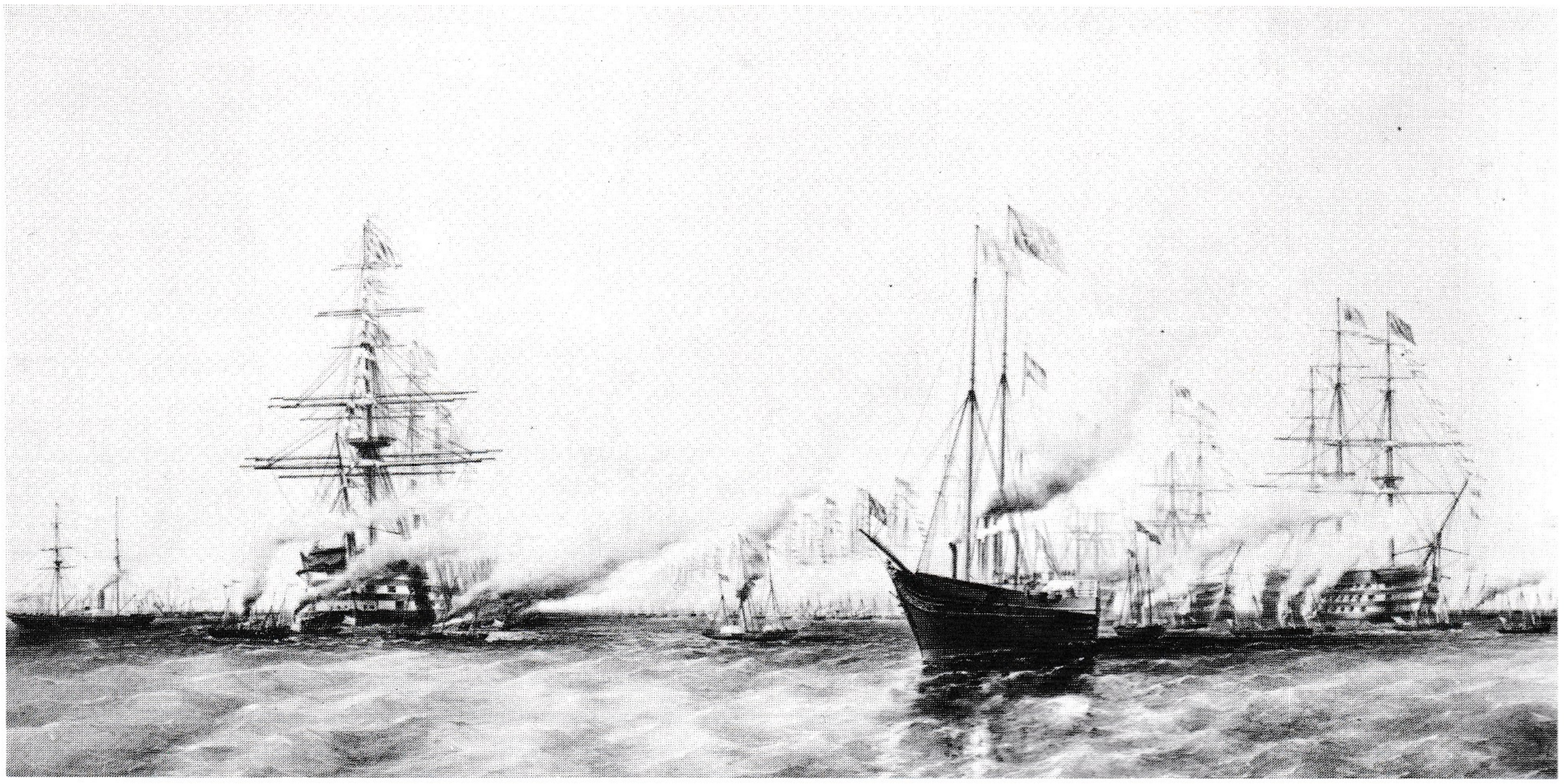
Some time after the Queen first intimated a desire to see the fleet before its dispersal, Sir Charles wrote to Colonel Phipps pointing out that this might happen soon, and he was anxious to know Her Majesty's wishes. At the same time he took the opportunity of suggesting that it would 'be wise and politic to give the two Houses of Parliament and the Country the opportunity of seeing our naval means'. He proposed, therefore, to adopt arrangements 'similar to those which succeeded so well at the last Naval Review in this respect'.[120]

Fortunately the First Lord was ably assisted in his task by Captain Alexander Milne (then a junior Lord at the Admiralty) and by Rear-Admiral Sir Maurice Berkeley (the First Sea Lord) as well as by the principal officers of the ports concerned. Between them they prepared intricate plans to convey and entertain 5,075 guests.[121]

Apart from the problem of organising a fleet of 240 ships so that they each had a berth, logistical problems of supplying the needs of these ships and their 30,000 men had to be overcome. A programme for the proposed evolutions had to be drafted and rehearsed; tickets and programmes needed to be printed (and reprinted when the date of the review was changed); public departments, diplomats, distinguished foreign visitors, members of the legislature and the press had to be issued with invitations and clear instructions, which in turn necessitated a detailed timetable to ensure that all guests embarked punctually and safely in the ships assigned to them. For this to be achieved the Admiralty had to liaise with the port authorities at Portsmouth and Southampton; Trinity House had to be consulted and informed of the arrangements to keep shipping lanes clear; the South Western Railway Company had to be informed of the demand which would be placed upon its resources, and (where appropriate) tenders had to be considered for providing refreshments aboard HM ships during the review. Throughout this hustle and bustle of activity the press needed to be informed promptly of any change of plan. Sometimes the press got it wrong and then misunderstandings could add to the burdens of the First Lord, as happened for instance, when the *Times* inadvertently suggested that the Queen would be attended by no less than ten naval aides-de-camp at the review! Colonel Phipps was quick to spot the mistake, and wrote in no uncertain terms to Sir Charles Wood 'I explained, I hope clearly, when at the Admiralty that the Queen wished for the attendance of the principal ADC and the one who was in waiting, if not in command of a ship – but not of any more'.[122] Finally, the Admiralty had to satisfy the vast number of private requests for information and tickets which flooded the Secretary's office.

Some of these letters are preserved at the Public Record Office. One letter is of particular interest owing to the argument put forward by its writer in his plea for a ticket to see the review:

Sir Charles,
Although professing no claim to the invention of



screw propelling, yet my brother and self, appreciating its merits and foreseeing what it would come to took it up *first* when almost all the other engineers had no opinion of it, and constructed the *Archimedes* in 1837, which was perfectly successful. In 1840 I proposed it to the Admiralty for all vessels of war as being far superior to paddle wheels, and we made the *Dwarf* . . . for the navy which was the *first that ever bore the pennant* . . . You may therefore conceive that I take great interest in the approaching . . . review . . . consisting almost wholly of screw ships, and shall therefore feel much obliged if you will have the goodness to send me a ticket to go on board some vessel *afloat* where I may see it [to] advantage.
I have the honour to be Sir Charles, your most humble servant. John Rennie.[123]

It is interesting to reflect that the success of the *Archimedes* prompted Brunel and his colleagues to convert the *Great Britain* to screw propulsion, so that she became the first large ship in the world to be built of iron and to be screw driven. The *Dwarf* was used in experimental trials with a variety of different screws, and by proving that fine lines were essential in a screw ship she influenced Thomas Lloyd in his decision to advise the Admiralty to lengthen the stern of the *Blenheim*, the success of which was a further step towards the ultimate objective, efficient screw auxiliary ships-of the-line such as Rennie was now able to witness at Spithead.

John Rennie's letter achieved its objective; he was sent two tickets to observe the naval review from the *Driver*. He was one of the lucky ones. When the Corporation of the Borough of Portsmouth applied to the Admiralty for a steam vessel for the use of the Council on the day of the review they were told that their Lordships had no steam vessel available for them.[124] However, when the officers comprising the garrison of Portsmouth made a similar request several days later they were informed that their Lordships had already placed the *Kite* steamer at their disposal.[125]

Owing to the interest generated by the review the Admiralty experienced difficulty in appropriating sufficient ships to accommodate all its guests. Indeed, the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company which was to have given the *Ripon* up for Admiralty service, was then obliged to ask for it back because 'the acceptances from our shareholders [to see the review] have so greatly exceeded all our calculations that we find we shall have upwards of 1,000 to provide for irrespective of the friends of the Directors and people whom we shall be compelled to accommodate'.[126] To appease the Board however, the Company offered the helpful advice that big ships, unable to anchor in the docks at Southampton because of their draught, would require 3 or 4 steam tugs to convey guests out to them and back again on the day of the review. The Company even ventured to suggest that the *Himalaya* iron screw ship, built for them in 1853 for passenger service, and purchased by the Admiralty in 1854 as a troopship, might be got out. She could accommodate, they said, '800 persons with ease and perfect comfort'. In the event the *Himalaya* was used to carry 700 guests to the review. She was, as Bartlett has pointed out, roughly the same size and power as the *Duke of Wellington*, then the most powerful ship-of-the-line afloat, but had proved too expensive for the P & O company to run, a consideration less important to the Admiralty than her size.[127]

As the review was to be staged in the uncertain weather of spring, it was clearly necessary to accommodate the visitors in ships which could provide overhead shelter, seats, and food laid out below for their comfort, all of which involved extra work. This was particularly true of Service ships not designed for civilian use, as the following letter from Commander Charles Johnson of the screw ship *Transit* demonstrates:

> We could manage to accommodate 400 or 500 . . . as you wish, but I would like the assistance of the

Dock Yard to place tables fore & aft main deck, and a temporary seat round the upper deck that would answer either to sit, or stand on to look over the bulwarks, to prevent overcrowding on poop or fore castle.[128]

Learning from the problems which had attended previous reviews, the Board of Trade released a public notice for the attention of all steamship owners warning them of the dangerous consequences which might ensue from the overcrowding of passenger steamers on the day of the review. Masters had to ensure that a Board of Trade Certificate was prominently displayed on their vessels.[129] The Admiralty issued its own safety instructions requesting that ships should only burn anthracite fuel to minimise unsightly black smoke which could obscure signalling.[130] Picket boats with special pennants patrolled Spithead to prevent excursion boats from straying into the review ground, and notices were displayed in prominent places warning everyone of the sea regulations, but in stronger terms than were laid down for the 1853 review.

In order to allow visitors and guests time to travel down to Portsmouth from London the review was not scheduled to start until around eleven o'clock in the morning. And yet, despite every attention to detail, the review planners were frustrated by modern technology. The age of the steam engine was still too new to be completely reliable, and the result was so incredible that even *Punch* was almost lost for words:

> Mr Punch cannot trust himself to deal with a subject so painful as that which is set forth in the above cuneiform hieroglyphics. He must borrow two sentences from the *Times*:–
>
> In the Lords – 'Lord Ravensworth called the attention of the government to the total failure of the arrangements made by the Admiralty for the accommodation of the Peers at the Naval Review'.
>
> In the Commons – 'at the first opportunity . . . a torrent of complaints respecting the arrangements and derangements . . . [for] the Naval Review, on the preceding day, burst forth from all parts of the House'.
>
> May Mr. Punch be permitted . . . to drop a veil over scenes which are almost too harrowing for description? Each legislative chamber has been a chamber of Horrors on each night since the Spithead catastrophies . . . Three events of that awful Wednesday will enable posterity to judge of its other terrors. A Bishop was shoved into a third-class carriage; two Judges had to work at a capstan; and the Premier of England was dragged away in the custody of a policeman. There can be no doubt whatever that the world is at an end, if we only knew it.[131]

So what went wrong that ruined weeks of careful preparation? In short, the failure of the locomotive of the 5.30 am excursion train, carrying 670 passengers, was the source of all the mischief, since it caused the line to Portsmouth and Southampton to be blocked for a considerable period.[132] Speaking for the South Western Railway Company in the House of Commons, Mr Chaplin explained that the engine used to draw the train was one of the Company's most powerful, but that a feed-pipe unfortunately burst at Esher and the train just managed to reach Woking before failing completely.[133] A correspondent writing to the editor of the *Times* and subscribing himself 'B' suggested however that 800 or 900 people were packed into the twenty-six carriages of the train, which in his opinion, was from the beginning clearly under-powered.[134] Lack of telegraphic communications and spare engines simply added to the delay. As a result the 'parliamentary train'[135] and every other train on the line was also delayed, which forced Captain John McDougall (responsible for administering the Packet Service at Southampton) to release some of the tenders reserved for the legislature at that port so that the various public departments waiting at the pier could be transported to their ships. When the parliamentary train arrived at Southampton it was almost three hours late! There was only one tender (the *Harbinger*) to convey members to their respective ships, and because she was overcrowded, it took an inordinately long time to do so. In addition, the *Harbinger* was hampered by other vessels impeding the entrance to Southampton, the Dockyard authorities having left by this hour to watch the review.[136] The legislature eventually reached Spithead halfway through the programme, and, having arrived 'their presence was officially ignored. They were not invited to take any part in the demonstration, or to approach in any proximity to the royal yacht, and were, in fact, treated as outsiders, like any of the hundred other steamers afloat. This was the unkindest cut of all'.[137]

But for the House of Lords, worse was to follow. They had been given the large troopship *Transit* for their accommodation, which vessel was theoretically capable of travelling at 12 knots, but crawled back to Southampton after the review at no more than 6 knots, and at one stage only 3½ knots before shuddering to a halt:

> By extraordinary exertions, the Lord Chief Justice having borne a hand, the *Transit* was, however, got

to move once more, though sadly against the grain; but as if to rebuke a compulsion so repugnant to her habits, she signalised her restored animation by running over a gun-boat.[138]

When the *Transit* finally reached Southampton it was ten o'clock in the evening; the Peers and their wives had missed the special return train to London and did not reach town till 3 am the following day, only to find there were no cabs to take them home!

When it came to explanations the noble First Lord of the Admiralty succeeded in vindicating himself and his colleagues from blame, resting it instead at the door of the South Western Railway Company which had been contracted to carry the Admiralty's guests to the review.[139] Even the breakdown of the *Transit* was dismissed with the promise of an enquiry to ascertain why 'her fires were let out'.[140] The reason, however, was embarrassingly simple. Mr Collier, the 3rd class Assistant Engineer of the *Transit*, was drunk! He was subsequently tried by Court Martial, severely reprimanded and dismissed his ship.[141] The Chief Engineer was removed from his post and reprimanded for negligence. Troubles do not come singly, and the Admiralty was not to escape censure:

> As another instance of official eccentricity, we may mention the contempt of the Admiralty for its own orders, which peremptorily enjoined all steamers to use nothing but anthracite coal . . . The Admiralty steamer, which should have been a pattern to others, was the only one that violated the injunction, vomiting from its funnel an endless volume of dense black smoke.[142]

In spite of meticulous planning, the Board of Admiralty also neglected to inform the general public that the fleet would be illuminated at night. News of the omission was hurriedly despatched by electric telegraph to London in time for the Thursday morning edition of the *Times*, which ran the following amusing report:

> The most interesting and only novel feature in the day's movements was that reserved for the night . . . and this was a thorough novelty to such of the present generation as accidentally witnessed it. We say 'accidentally' because no notice of an intention to illuminate was given in the Admiralty's programme, and consequently thousands who had borne the cold and languor of the day . . . left on their return to distant homes before the ships made this grand and brilliant demonstration [which] was effected by simultaneously lighting up the yards and portholes with blue lights.[143]

The general consensus of opinion regarding the review shortly after seems to have been that notwithstanding the vast number of ships assembled at Spithead for the occasion, lack of imagination had rendered it both dull and tedious. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* felt that the error had been to anchor the ships in two long dreary lines extending five or six miles: 'even the little gunboats, which clearly have no place in the line of battle, and are as like each other as peas in a pod, were drawn out in endless succession'.[144] The evolutions were equally unimaginative. The gunboats followed the royal yacht between the lines and then took up stations opposite the fortifications of Portsmouth and Gosport, ready for an attack which, when it came, only lasted some fifteen to twenty minutes and was greeted, we are told, with silence from the guns of the forts. The Lieutenant-Governor, apparently realising that he would have to foot the bill for powder consumed, had withdrawn the ammunition.[145] As for the bigger warships, they merely steamed out in two columns to pivot-ships moored close to the Nab Light, and then back again to their former positions, without the aid of sail to lend animation to the scene. This was the review! The disappointment for one journalist was then completed when he passed the whole night

> in a second class railway carriage, in the society of a slightly inebriated Irish lady of the middle class, who looked on the nearest passenger in the light of a bolster, and six grumbling, nodding, cold, hungry, stupid masses of great coats, who had, probably, been respectable English citizens in the earlier part of the day, but were now reduced to that lower form of animal organization known as the disgusted excursionist.[146]

His was the fate which thousands of others were doomed to experience on their return to London. But were their complaints justified?

Vice-Admiral Seymour, who, more than any other person, was responsible for the actual execution of the review, informed his son privately that the effect of making sail would undoubtedly have made the affair more picturesque, but, given the full programme for the Queen, there would not have been sufficient time after the large ships had steamed out of Spithead and returned, to achieve this without giving up the attack of the gunboats, otherwise the royal yacht might have missed the tide when returning to harbour. He also argued against combined movements of sail and steam since they could not preserve the same regular order.[147] According to the memoirs of

Admiral Sir Edward Gennys Fanshawe, Seymour even contemplated keeping the ships at anchor on the grounds that with so many spectators, private steamers and pleasure boats crowding round the fleet there could be a fearful accident: 'run down one of those pleasure boats – drown half a dozen people – why – you wouldn't hear the end of it for a month!'[148] The Port Admiral called a meeting to consider the question, and although he advocated the more prudent course, the question was decided otherwise: the fleet weighed under steam and without any serious mishap. Fanshawe perhaps gives the impression that Seymour was unadventurous, even a stick-in-the-mud, but this would be entirely wrong. At the time Fanshawe was a Captain in his early forties, whereas Seymour, at 68 years of age and a Vice-Admiral, was responsible for some 240 warships about to be paraded before the Queen and the nation. In a letter written to his son Francis in the early stages of the review preparations, we detect not timidity but the views of an experienced sea officer only too well aware of the pitfalls which might arise on such an occasion:

> Where so many vessels will be in movement (three or four times as many as at the preceding reviews) and the majority commanded by fine young fellows but inexperienced in the management of their vessels, the manoeuvres must be as simple as possible or there will be awful smashing, and any accidents of consequence would detract from what one hopes to be the best proof of great naval power . . .[149]

It is worth mentioning that three weeks before the review Seymour had occasion to complain to their Lordships about numerous collisions which he said were occurring daily, and caused for the most part by the mismanagement of the gunboats.[150] He proposed that one way to minimise the problem was to coal these vessels at the Motherbank instead of allowing them into the harbour, and with that object in mind he consulted Rear-Admiral William Fanshawe Martin, the dockyard Superintendent, to see how best this could be done. It was decided that three old sloops should be employed as coaling vessels, two of which were to be moored at the Motherbank and the third kept filled in harbour ready to replace either of the other two when one of them became empty. The arrangement was approved by the Admiralty, but only as a temporary measure.

An important question which remained to be answered, and one which was taken up by the whole of Fleet Street, was whether the naval review was justified? The *Naval and Military Gazette* thought that it was, arguing that the fleet at Spithead was 'a more prompt adviser than either Austria or Prussia' in inducing the Tsar to make peace.[151] Sir Charles Wood justified the cost of the review[152] on similar grounds, pointing out that as the peace had not yet been ratified it was necessary to keep the fleet in commission.[153] The *Globe* (a Whig paper) at first treated the disasters in a comical vein, but seeing the government come under such heavy criticism, changed its tack the next night and condemned the Conservatives for trying to make cheap party capital out of the misfortunes of the administration when they were not in possession of the full facts.[154] *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, on the other hand, was unreservedly scathing in its rebuke of an incompetent administration.[155] A far more serious allegation was levelled at the government in the House of Commons by Mr Newdegate, who argued that

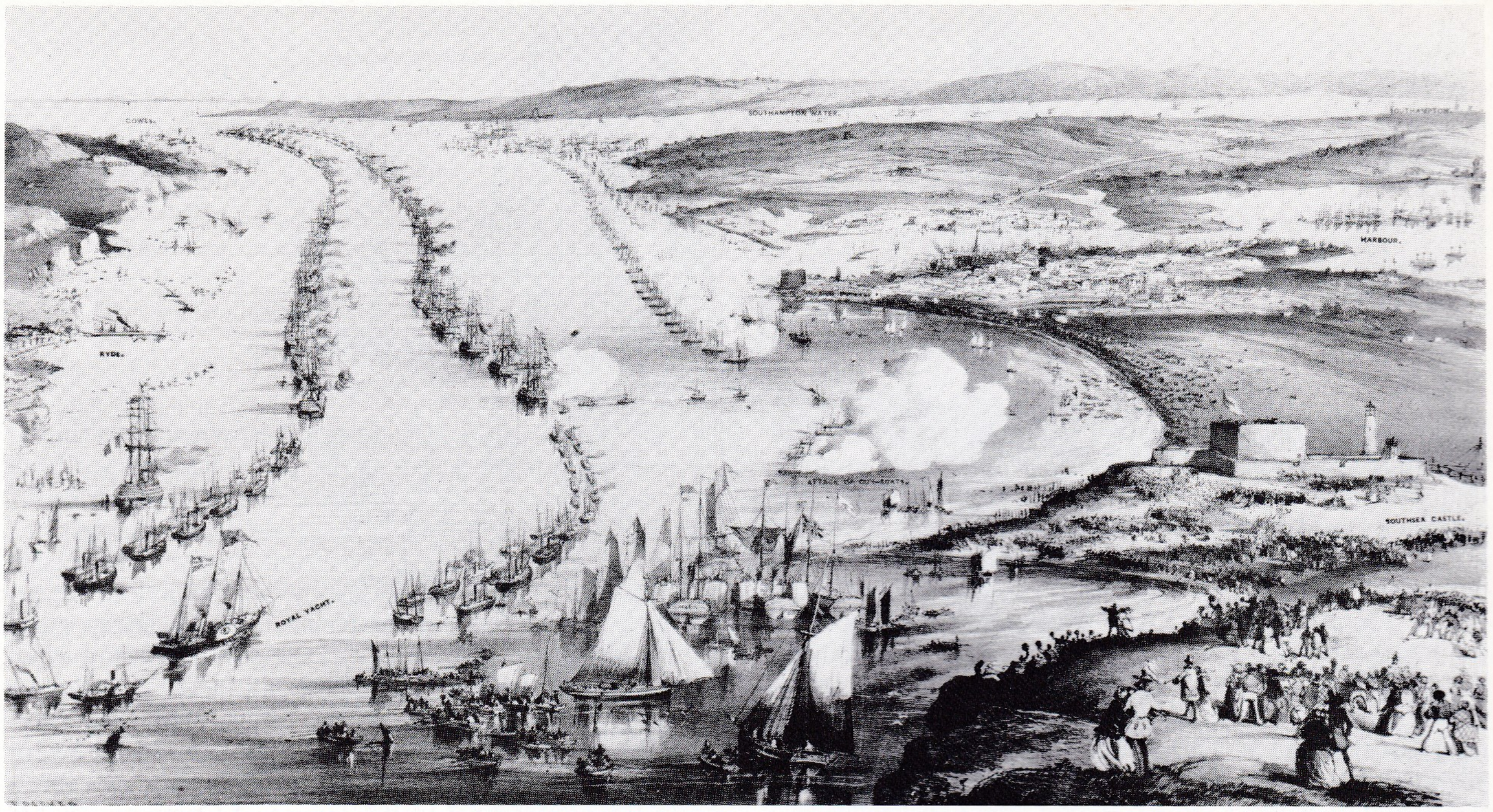
> a review of this kind was intended to impress foreigners with an idea of the power, the grandeur, and the organisation of this country, showing that, although we had consented to close the present struggle, we were prepared, if necessary, to continue the war. But all that had been marred by the absence of that communication between different departments, the effect of which was so painfully apparent in the Crimea. The Government had literally failed in reaching Portsmouth and Southampton on a pleasure trip.[156]

However the South Western Railway Company which had been instrumental in bringing such odium on the government, seems to have come out of the business fairly well. No fewer than 867 carriages left Waterloo station on Tuesday and Wednesday morning, bringing the company, we are told, £13,000 in receipts![157] But despite all the misgivings and criticisms to which the government of the day was subjected, it was probably the *Leader* which expressed the underlying strength of patriotic feeling of the vast majority of those who saw the review when it claimed:

> We do not write in the service of a faction, and we are free to feel and express the simple pride of Englishmen (a pride in which there need be no bluster and no blood-thirstiness) when we say that the spectacle at Spithead was worth a pilgrimage to see, and a life time to remember.[158]

**Conclusion**

After everybody had gone home and life in the dockyard started to return to normal there was the inevitable business of taking stock and tying up loose ends. Vice-Admiral Seymour remarked in a letter to his son Francis on the 25th that nothing seemed to have been settled about




breaking up the fleet that month. It must have been no small matter to decide what to do with all the gun vessels, gun boats and mortar vessels since there were some 150 of them present at the review, not to mention others still being completed. On 27 April the Treaty of Paris which had brought an end to the Crimean War was ratified. Peace was at last formally guaranteed.

On 1 May Captain Sir Baldwin Wake Walker, Surveyor of the Navy, wrote to Rear-Admiral Superintendent Martin at Portsmouth Dockyard requesting him to report 'with as little delay as possible, if there is any Government Ground in that neighbourhood belonging either to the Admiralty or the War Department which could be made available for hauling up Gun Boats, Mortar Vessels, or Mortar Floats, and, if so, to name the locality, and the number of vessels which could be laid up there, with any observations he may have to offer on the subject, for the information of their Lordships'.[159] A subsequent communication from the Department of the Surveyor stated that no more gun vessels, gun boats, mortar vessels or mortar floats were to be masted or rigged for the time being.[160] Various experiments were subsequently tried out to determine whether any of the Gun Boats could be modified to perform effectively without their screws. After the war the Crimean gunboats provided valuable service to the Empire, some of them going out to China the following year. Those which did not rot owing to hasty construction continued in service until the 1870s when new classes were built to supersede them.

On a personal level there was the usual round of promotions and disappointment for those not promoted. Vice-Admiral Seymour resigned himself to not receiving a GCB for his part in the review but was pleased that his nominee, Flag Lieutenant Mark Pechell, was promoted to Commander. The Port Admiral, as can be deduced from his correspondence, was always attentive to the interests of his men at Portsmouth, both for their well-being and their promotion. Even when preoccupied with his own official cares, as he must surely have been at the time of the Grand Naval Review, he found time to seek justice for those under him. One gentleman in particular did not escape Seymour's attention, and his case is an interesting one because it tells us something about what life must have been like for a clerk working in Portsmouth dockyard in the 1850s.

> In the late pressure of business caused by the number of ships and vessels at this port and which has only been carried on through the exertions of the Secretary and those in his office . . . I have been additionally impressed with the great merits of the Principal Clerk Mr George Grandidier and I think it due to him to bring them especially under the observation of the LCA with the hope that the office he executes may be placed upon a more advantageous footing both at this and the other principal Seaports, or that Mr Grandidier may be promoted without being withdrawn from the post he occupies. The Office of Chief Clerk is one of responsibility and the labour is incessant and it requires a thorough knowledge of the practice of the Station and the records which in late years have accumulated in threefold proportions. Mr Grandidier has been in the office 12 years without being absent on leave for a day. His time is incessantly occupied from 7.30 am the time the mail arrives, until the Telegraph closes at 7 pm and his pay is £91/- as he only ranks as Assistant Paymaster from 1853 although he entered the Service in 1844, the previous existing instructions not admitting of his passing. There are two Seniors in the office as Clerks, one a Paymaster who receives £249 per annum the other the highest rate of Clerks pay £127/- but neither of these Gentlemen could undertake the duties of Chief Clerk with equal advantage to the Public Service, if willing to under-

*Review of the Fleet at Spithead by The Queen 23 April 1856*
Portsmouth City Museum

go the incessant labour it requires. I beg to add that I had no knowledge of Mr Grandidier before I was appointed to the Command at Portsmouth but that my predecessor Sir Thomas Cochrane spoke of his unremitting assiduity in similar terms to those I have used in my present recommendation of him to their Lordships favour.[161]

Eleven years were to elapse before the next fleet review at Spithead. Those years would coincide with major strides in the fields of ordnance, metallurgy and naval architecture. In particular, it was to be a period when the gun would become the main arbiter of change in the Royal Navy. In a sense the story of the sailing warship had come full circle since the days when the *Mary Rose* and her contemporaries established the principle of placing broadside batteries of guns into a ship's hull. At that time the demands of ordnance dictated warship design, a design which would change very little over the centuries. Now the gun was to assert itself once more. Since wooden ships were so vulnerable to the incendiary effects of shellfire it became necessary to build them clad with iron as protection against this possibility – hence the construction of *La Gloire*. It then became imperative for Britain to reply with a ship which was as superior to *La Gloire* as the former was to all other ships then in service. The *Warrior* proved to be the answer; a warship which was iron-hulled as well as armour-plated, and which could out-run and outgun any other ship in the world. The years leading up to and including the Crimean War did much to accelerate the pace of change and provide a climate in which ships like the *Warrior* could be created. In this sense L G Carr Laughton put the value of naval reviews into their true perspective when he argued:

> The Spithead reviews of the early [eighteen] fifties found the fleet entering upon a long period of change, a period which lasted for approximately fifty years. For [an] appreciation of the great changes made in the gradual transition from masts and sails to unaided steam propulsion, and from hulls of oak to armoured ships of steel, the great naval reviews of the latter half of the nineteenth century afford a ready illustration, and in this sense have a meaning and importance beyond that of mere pageantry.[162]

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NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

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[3] P. M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (1976), p. 156.

[4] R. G. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: the Timber Problem of the Royal Navy 1652–1862* (1926), pp. 391–398.

[5] M. Lewis, 'Armed Forces and the Art of War: Navies', J. P. T. Bury (ed.), *New Cambridge Modern History*, X (1960), p. 289.

[6] G. S. Graham, *The Politics of Naval Supremacy: Studies in British Maritime Ascendancy* (1965), p. 71.

[7] M. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

[8] HMS *Ardent,* then being built as a sailing sloop, was ordered to be converted for screw propulsion under the new name HMS *Rattler*. In the same year the *Mermaid*, a small iron steamer, was purchased by the Admiralty and renamed HMS *Dwarf*, thus becoming the first screw-driven vessel in the Royal Navy.

[9] According to the *Hampshire Telegraph* (7 Mar. 1842), it was the Revd Archdeacon Wilberforce who, in a conversation at Brighton Pavilion, recommended to Prince Albert a visit to Portsmouth. The Queen, overhearing, is reputed to have insisted that she 'must be of the party' too. The visit was therefore speedily arranged.

[10] N(ational) M(aritime) M(useum) COD/21/2, f.58. (numbered 60 on the MS).

[11] *Naval and Military Gazette* (26 Feb. 1842), pp. 130–131.

[12] The Admiralty list of HM ships and vessels present at Portsmouth and Spithead on the occasion of the Queen's visit was as follows: *Alfred* (50), *Formidable* (84), *Vindictive* (50), *Victory* (104), *Queen* (110), *Royal George* (yacht), *Excellent* (48), *Winchester* (50), *Carysfort* (26), *St Vincent* (120), *Black Eagle* (Admiralty yacht) and *Ringdove* (16). Of these, the *Formidable, Alfred* and *Queen* were anchored at Spithead: P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice) Adm. 1/5519 (3 Mar. 1842). The *Morning Herald* (1 Mar. 1842) also lists *Nautilus, Sylva, Volcano* and *Styx* as being in harbour at the time. Some of the older ships such as *Donegal* were moved to the north of the dockyard because moorings for large ships were in great demand.

[13] A. C. Benson and Viscount Esher (eds.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria 1837–1861*, Vol. 1 (1907), pp. 382–383.

[14] NMM COD/21/2, f.63.

[15] *Morning Herald* (1 Mar. 1842), p. 5.

[16] *The Royal Visit to Portsmouth on Monday, February 28, 1842*, S. Horsey, Jun., Queen Street, Portsea (1842), 35 pp.

[17] Lady Bourchier (ed), *Memoirs of the Life of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington*, Vol. II (1873), p. 524.

[18] *The Royal Visit to Portsmouth, op. cit.*, pp. 18–20; also 'Her Majesty's Visit to Portsmouth', *Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle for 1842*, p. 277. There were firework displays from the Semaphore and various parts of the town, which might have been even more impressive had not an explosion on Monday morning at the manufactory of Messrs D'Ernest in Lambeth Walk, London, destroyed the building and £300 worth of fireworks destined for Portsmouth. Four people, including the proprietor, were killed: *Courier* (28 Feb.), p. 3; *Standard* (1 Mar.), p. 3; *Globe* (1 Mar. 1842).

[19] *Morning Herald* (2 Mar. 1842), p. 6.

[20] *Punch*, Vol. 2 (Jan.–June 1842), p. 113.

[21] Benson and Esher, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

[22] J. A. Sharp (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Services of Rear-Admiral Sir William Symonds* (1858), p. 238; *Naval and Military Gazette* (5 Mar. 1842), p. 152.

[23] S. Lee (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, LV (1898), p. 279.

[24] D. Lyon, *Steam, Steel and Torpedoes: the Warship in the 19th Century, (The Ship)* (1980), p. 16.

[25] Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

[26] F. L. Robertson, *The Evolution of Naval Armament* (1921), p. 54.

[27] Throughout the early 1840s a number of iron steamers were ordered to be built by the Board of Admiralty, but experiments carried out in Woolwich, and on board the *Ruby* at Portsmouth in 1846, decided the new Whig administration which came into office in the summer of 1846 to convert five iron steam frigates ordered in 1844 into transports. Further unfavourable tests carried out in 1849–50 led to the decision that iron vessels should not even be approved in future for mail service: J. P. Baxter, *The Introduction of the Ironclad Warship* (1933), pp. 33–47.

[28] Benson and Esher, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

[29] NMM COD/21/2, ff.68–69.

[30] NMM COD/21/2, f.58. (numbered as 60 at top of manuscript page) and f.63.

[31] *The Royal Visit to Portsmouth, op. cit.*, p. 25.

[32] Bourchier, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

[33] C. J. Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power: 1815–1853* (1963), p. 153.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 158. In his pamphlet the Prince de Joinville states 'with a steam navy, an aggressive warfare of the most audacious nature may be carried out at sea'. At the time the pamphlet was published and given such wide publicity, it was probably sentiment such as this which were most worrying to the British public, but informed readers would have been far more worried by Joinville's suggestion that large frigates should be deployed on distant stations to be used in the event of war as commerce raiders: William Peake, *On the State of the Naval Strength of France in Comparison with that of England. Translated from the French of His Royal Highness the Prince de Joinville,* (4th edition 1844), 24 pp. British Library copy: Shelf-mark 1397.f.34 (11).

[35] Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

[36] *The Times* (9 Oct. 1844), p. 4. [a report from the French newspaper *Le National*]

[37] S. F. L. Schetky, *Ninety Years of Work and Play* (1877), pp. 204–205.

[38] *The Times* (16 Oct. 1844), p. 5.

[39] Designed by Sir William Symonds and launched as a paddle-wheel yacht with sails, one funnel and two masts, on 26 Apr. 1843. the brig *Nautilus* was tender from 1843 to 1845, when the *Fairy* replaced her. In 1854 *Victoria and Albert I* was renamed *Osborne*, and the following year *Victoria and Albert II* was launched and superseded her predecessor of the same name, as the principal yacht: Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp. 303–305. The furniture of the original *Victoria and Albert* had been taken from the sailing yacht *Royal George*. See also C. M. Gavin, *Royal Yachts* (1932), *passim*.

[40] *Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle,* 2nd series, 8, No. 11 (Nov. 1844), p. 707.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 709.

[42] T. Martin, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, Vol. 1, (3rd edition 1875), p. 236.

[43] A. C. Benson and Viscount Esher (eds.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria 1837–1861*, Vol. 2 (1907), pp. 30–31.

[44] N. Gash, *Sir Robert Peel: the Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830*

(1972), pp. 518–519.

45 *Hansard*, 3rd series, LXXXI (1845), c. 507.

46 *Ibid.*, LXXXII (1845), c. 1224.

47 J. H. Briggs, *Naval Administration 1827 to 1892: the Experience of 65 Years* (1897), p. 64.

48 Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–148.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 152–153.

50 E. A. M. Laing, *Steam Wooden Warship Building in Portsmouth Dockyard 1832–52*, The Portsmouth Papers No. 42 (1985), pp. 6, 11 and 13.

51 J. Fincham, *A History of Naval Architecture* (1851), pp. 225–226.

52 Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

53 *Hansard*, XCII (1847), c. 186.

54 Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75.

55 He was opposed, for instance, to increasing the length of his ships, disliked iron steam vessels of war and doubted the efficacy of the screw propeller. The hull shape adopted by Symonds was found to be ill-suited for steam machinery: H. Busk, *The Navies of the World: Their Present State and Future Capabilities* (1859), pp. 57, 131; Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp. 332–333; Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

56 In June 1845 *The Times* printed letters by George Frederick Young (1791–1870), a London shipowner, calling for reforms in the Department of Naval Construction, and for the reinstatement of the School of Naval Architecture, the whole being managed by three commissioners. A correspondent, writing to the *Naval and Military Gazette* (21 June p. 392) recommended that 'there should be a board of scientific men established, under the control of the Admiralty, for the future construction of our ships of war', an opinion with which the editor of that paper concurred. There were many naval officers, however, who approved of the Surveyor's work, and *Mitchell's Newspaper Press Directory* for 1846 informs us that the *United Service Gazette* showed itself in Symonds' favour too (copy held in Trinity College Cambridge, p. 92). Yet in 1847 Symonds felt obliged to retire from his post following an Admiralty decision the previous year to appoint a Committee of Reference (effectively to sit in judgement upon his work). It was the last straw. He had already suffered the indignity of having all work on his First and Second Rate ships suspended by Cockburn (First Naval Lord 1841–6) on 9 Dec. 1844: A. Lambert, *Battleships in Transition* (1984), p. 16.

57 *The Times* (7 July 1845), p. 6. The quotation is similar in essence to remarks made by Sir George Cockburn in the House of Commons earlier that year: *Hansard*, LXXVIII (1845), c. 1265. A debate on the merits or otherwise of Sir William Symonds' ships took place in the House of Commons on 29 Apr. 1847.

58 B. Lavery, *The Ship of the Line*, Vol. 1 (1983), p. 156.

59 Benson and Esher, *op. cit.*, II, p. 41. 'Woods and Forests', or more fully 'Woods, Forests, and Land Revenues', is an allusion to the department in the Civil Service having responsibility for Crown woods and forests.

60 *Hampshire Advertiser* (28 June 1845), p. 5.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 *The Times* (30 June 1845), p. 6.

64 *Hampshire Advertiser*, (28 June 1845), p. 5.

65 *Morning Herald* (24 June 1845), p. 11.

66 *Morning Chronicle* (24 June 1845), p. 5.

67 *Supplement to the Morning Herald* (24 June 1845), p. 11.

68 Schetky, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

69 *The Times* (16 July 1845), p. 6.

70 *Ibid.*

71 Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp. 340–341.

72 *A Series of Drawings Illustrative of Her Majesty's Visit to Spithead, July 15th 1845, to Witness the Sailing of the Experimental Squadron* (1846), p. 2. An account of these 'apparently' successful trials is given in Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp. 338–344. Completely opposite conclusions were drawn by Fincham, *op. cit.*, pp. 234–239, who seemed irritated by the empirical approach which saw room for improvement in one part of a ship without relating it to the general scientific principles governing naval architecture. In his view, trials which did not lay down uniform guidance for ships of the same class and dimensions could have little utility. Ballast and trim of sails, as well as stowage, could be standardised where ships were identical. Symonds argued that there were many variables which influenced the success or failure of sailing warships in different circumstances, not least being the competence of the Captain appointed to command a ship. It does seem strange, however, to find that the trials were interrupted to copper-bottom the *Superb* and *Vanguard*. All ships should have been examined prior to the trials to ensure equal chances of displaying their capabilities.

73 *Illustrated London News* (19 July 1845), p. 43.

74 Fincham, *op. cit.*, pp. 352–353.

75 Bartlett, *op. cit.*, pp. 324–329; D. K. Brown, 'The First Steam Battleships', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 63, No. 4 (1977), pp. 327–333. 1846 saw the launching of the first screw frigate, HMS *Amphion*, converted to steam whilst still on the stocks. HMS *Ajax* became the world's first completed steam battleship on 23rd September 1846. Everything seemed set for a smooth transition. Unfortunately, the *Rattler*'s success in 1845 was deceptive. She was small and had a fine stern which assisted the screw. Designers were at first unaware how important this was, until the trials of the *Dwarf* in 1846. In consequence, when larger ships with bluff sterns, such as HMS *Dauntless*, were fitted with screw-propellers, they were comparative failures. It was soon apparent that longer ships and finer lines assisted the screw. By the time that the *Blenheim* went to sea in 1848 (the first screw capital ship to do so) significant improvements had been made. The following year work began on the *Agamemnon*, the first purpose-built screw ship of the line in the Royal Navy. In January 1852 work on sailing ships of the line was suspended.

76 P. W. Brock and B. Greenhill, *Steam and Sail: in Britain and North America* (1973), p. 14.

77 Laing, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.

78 Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

79 E. H. Seymour, *My Naval Career and Travels* (1911), p. 9.

80 *Morning Post* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 5.

81 *Morning Herald* (13 Aug. 1853), p. 5.

82 *Punch*, XXV (July–Dec. 1853), p. 74.

83 *Morning Advertiser* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 4.

84 *The Times* (11 Aug. 1853), p. 8.

85 *Morning Post* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 5.

86 *The Sun* (11 Aug. 1853), (editorial).

87 An outbreak of measles amongst the royal family, to which both the Queen and Prince Albert fell victim, delayed the review.

88 It would appear that, contrary to most contemporary reports, the two daughters of the Russian Emperor, Nicholas I (the Crown Princess Olga of Wurtemberg and the Grand Duchess Maria Nikolajewna of Leuchtenberg) did not attend the naval review. Their presence in England at this sensitive time with a letter from their father, recommending them to Queen Victoria's protection, led to speculation that they were here on a mission. They were certainly surprised by the degree of anti-

Russian feeling. The day before the review Prince Albert, in a letter to Baron Stockmar, fully expected that the ladies would be present. But the *Morning Post* of 12 Aug. (page 5) makes it clear that, although the Queen's yacht *Fairy* carried the Russian eagle at the main mast, only the Crown Prince of Wurtemberg was on board, the Emperor's daughters having visited the Duchess of Cambridge at Kew instead. Perhaps, in view of the political implications of the naval review, the ladies decided it was politic to stay away: Robert Wilson, *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria*, Vol. II (n.d.), pp. 569–570, cf. *The Times* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 7.

89 C. F. Vitzthum, *St Petersburg and London in the Years 1852–1864*, Vol. I (1887), p. 63.

90 *United Service Gazette* (13 Aug. 1853), p. 4.

91 According to the *Morning Post* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 5, 'every tub that could hoist a sail was out and manned at day-break, each crew vieing with the other, in their endeavours to attract spectators on board at prices varying from five shillings a head to two guineas.'
A complete list of the ships reviewed and the steamers appropriated to carry guests was provided by the *Morning Herald* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 5. A special supplement on the review was published by the *Illustrated London News* (20 Aug. 1853), pp. 145–156.

92 *The Times* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 7.

93 Regrettably, the official Admiralty organisational papers for the 1853 naval review may have disappeared. According to the *Digest of Papers* received at the Secretary's Office 'All the correspondence relative to this review will be found bound up together and marked.' A similar entry under a different head of the *Digest* adds that 'The Queen was present on this occasion, also the Clerks of the Admiralty! There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous!!' The papers may have been weeded later in the nineteenth century. The author found no trace of them at the P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice) (Kew) and would be interested to know if anyone reading this paper has knowledge of their fate. PRO Adm 12/573 (section 59.1) and Adm 12/576 (section 86). Both *Digest* volumes are dated 1853.
One of the more distinctive features of a naval review was absent from the proceedings on this occasion. According to *The Times* the squadron did not man the yards 'for it has been almost decided not to continue the practice in steamers, on account of the injury to the men's clothes by the soot on the yards and rigging:' *The Times* (12 Aug. 1853), p. 7. Their Lordships must have had second thoughts because most reviews thereafter (weather permitting) were attended by the traditional practice of manning the yards, or manning ship when the former were absent. On the subject of damage caused to the men's clothing by working on steam vessels, the Parliamentary and Financial Secretary of the Admiralty in 1845, Henry Lowry Corry, issued a memorandum in which their Lordships agreed that crews of steam vessels employed in coaling were to be issued annually with overalls, trousers and shoes, 'and monthly to each individual, provided the vessel has been under steam, or has received Coals on board in that period – ½lb of soap.': NMM POR/P/20, Circular no. 5, Admiralty (26 June 1845).

94 J. Mowbray, *Seventy Years at Westminster* (1900), p. 90.

95 It is on record that to build the *Duke of Wellington* an oak forest of 76 acres was cleared of trees: W. P. Trotter, *The Royal Navy in Old Photographs* (1975), Plate 3.

96 T. Martin, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, Vol. 2 (1876), p. 500.

97 Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

98 *Illustrated London News* (20 Aug. 1853), p. 146.

99 Mowbray, *op. cit.*, pp. 89–90.

100 Schetky, *op. cit.* p. 238.

101 J. Winton, *Hurrah for the Life of a Sailor: Life on the Lower-Deck of the Victorian Navy* (1977), p. 112.

102 After the war Napier told the House of Commons that 'he actually went to sea without anything in his cabin – without servants, without knives and forks, and without baggage.': *Hansard*, CXLI (1856), c. 50.

103 The manning problem was to be a major cause for concern until after the Crimean War. Although the most important development, that of continuous service (after 1 July 1853) came too late for the war, it did mark the start of an ultimately successful attempt to reform the recruiting system: R. Taylor, 'Manning the Royal Navy: the Reform of the Recruiting System, 1852–1862', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 44 No.4 (1958), pp. 302–313; 45(1) (1959), pp. 46–58. See also J. S. Bromley (ed.), *The Manning of the Royal Navy: Selected Public Pamphlets, 1693–1873* (Navy Records Society, 119 1974).

104 A. B. Erickson, *The Public Career of Sir James Graham*, (1952), p. 337.

105 A journal kept at the time of the departure of the Baltic Fleet, by a lady who preferred to remain anonymous, was published to help the West Highland Relief Fund in 1855. It graphically records four days at Portsmouth on the eve of war, March 1854. Copies are held in the British Library (9077.d.32) and P(ortsmouth) C(ity) R(ecords) O(ffice) Norster Box 20. It has also been quoted extensively in The Portsmouth Papers No. 19.

106 *The Times* (10 Mar. 1854), p. 9.

107 T. Martin, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, Vol. 3 (1877), p. 34.

108 W. Besant and J. Rice, *By Celia's Arbour: a Tale of Portsmouth Town* (1892), pp. 78–79.

109 Because of the disappointing performance of the Baltic Fleet during 1854, the new fleet (all steamers) was commanded by a younger officer, Rear-Admiral the Hon. Richard Saunders Dundas. The Queen was not able to review this fleet, but she did go down to Portsmouth to witness the departure of an advance division (Flying Squadron) of seven steamers on 20 March 1855: *The Times* (21 Mar. 1855), p. 5. The main body of the fleet did not sail until 4th April, but some of these ships were already anchored at Spithead on 20 March, including a number of the new light-draught screw gunboat tenders which were to prove so useful in the forthcoming campaign.

110 As a professional artillery officer, the French Emperor Napoleon III saw the need for armoured protection from Russian shell guns. The resultant floating batteries were a tribute to Anglo-French cooperation. Each country built five batteries for use in the war, although only three (all French) were available in time for the attack on Kinburn. British dockyard officers came up with the suggestion that iron plates afforded the best protection against shot, and a suitable quality of metal was developed for the purpose, indicating the rapid progress made in the science of metallurgy. The new forged iron plates were more malleable, backed by teak and fastened to the sides of wooden ships by rivets. An account of how the original French batteries came to be built is given in J. P. Baxter, *The Introduction of the Ironclad Warship* (1933), pp. 69–91.

111 Before the war was over, King Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia-Piedmont paid a state visit to France and then Britain. In his honour a naval review was held, albeit a small affair, when he visited Portsmouth accompanied by Prince Albert and the

Duke of Cambridge on 3 December 1855. The fleet comprised sixteen warships moored in two lines, the small vessels forming the port line, and the line-of-battle ships the starboard line: *The Times* (4 Dec. 1855), p. 7. Sardinian troops had fought with the allies during the war, but, despite talk of fighting for justice and freedom, Victor Emmanuel was possibly more concerned to secure a place on the councils of the great powers so that he could establish a claim for their assistance in Italian affairs, then dominated by Austria.

112 *The Times* (24 Apr. 1856), p. 6.

113 For a study of the construction of the British floating batteries see G. A. Oborn, 'The First of the Ironclads: the Armoured Batteries of the 1850s', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 50 (1964), pp. 189–198. (cf. note 110).

114 *The Times* (24 Apr. 1856), p. 8.

115 Winton, *op. cit.*, p. 122. The original source of this poem is a diary in private hands, of which a microfilm copy is kept at the National Maritime Museum: *Diary of Surgeon Lt. John C. Sabben, HMS Sphinx in the Crimea, 1854–1857*: NMM Neg. MRF/135; MS 82/089; JOD/108, pp. 188–189 (documents acquired singly by the museum/journals and diaries).

116 It had been thought that the organisational papers for the 1856 review, and for every other Victorian naval review, except Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, had been destroyed: See J. L. Lant, 'The Spithead Naval Review of 1887', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 62, No. 1 (1976), p. 70. The author has discovered that, on the contrary, many of these papers are still to be found at the PRO in Kew. The bound volume of official arrangements for the 1856 naval review is in Adm. 1/5675.

117 Seymour of Ragley, *My Father's Letters from Portsmouth Commencing 1856*: Warwick County Record Office, Seymour MSS CR 114A/695/13, Private letter, dated 7 Apr. 1856. This remark was made in spite of a letter sent by Seymour to Wood on 30 March, warning the latter of potential hazards to success: Seymour MSS CR 114A/427/5.

118 Archives of the Wood Family of Hickleton & Garrowby, Borthwick Institute, University of York. A4.75 part II, *Letters from Sir Charles Phipps 1855–1865*.

119 British Library, Additional MS. 49, 565, Halifax Papers Vol. XXXV, Letter Book, Vol. XI Admiralty, 13 Nov. 1855–31 May 1856, ff.171, 3.

120 *Ibid*. The 'last naval review' referred to was that of 1853. After the review was over, Sir Charles Wood confirmed in the House of Commons that 'he had been to a considerable extent guided by what occurred at the last naval review': *Hansard*, CXLI (1856), c. 1183. It is therefore all the more disappointing that these papers should have disappeared. (See note 93).

121 The figure comes from a manuscript entitled *Expenses incurred in Connection with the Entertainment of Visitors on the Occasion of the Naval Review, 23rd April 1856*. The number relates to the quantity of tickets issued by the Admiralty for that review: PRO Adm. 1/7336B, 16015.

122 Hickleton Papers, A 4.75 part II.

123 PRO Adm. 1/5675.

124 PCRO CM1/3; PRO Adm. 2/1683, p. 40.

125 PRO Adm. 1/5675.

126 *Ibid*.

127 Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 325; D. Howarth and S. Howarth, *The Story of P & O: The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company* (1986), p. 89.

128 PRO Adm. 1/5675.

129 Merchant Shipping Act, 1854. All passenger steamers were required to carry a Board of Trade Certificate.

130 PRO Adm. 1/5675 and Adm. 2/1683, p. 47; Seymour Papers, *Portsmouth Station Official Letter Book*: Warwick County Record Office, CR 114A/429.

131 *Punch*, XXX (Jan.–June 1856), p. 172. The allusion to a Bishop being shoved into a third-class carriage arose from the scramble for seats on the return train to London: the Peers, having missed their special train, were forced to obtain seats on whatever train was available. The two judges were obliged to work at a capstan on board the *Transit* when that ship eventually departed for the review from Southampton, time being short. It was the *Morning Herald* which reported the Prime Minister's difficulty in obtaining a seat on the train reserved for Cabinet Ministers. Apparently, a policeman thought he was trying to board the train without a ticket, and pulled him off. Lord Palmerston, we are told, was then obliged to go by the next train which left fifteen minutes later: *Morning Herald* (25 Apr. 1856), p. 5.

132 British Library, Additional MS. 49,558, ff.157–168; PRO Adm. 1/5675.

133 *Hansard*, CXLI (1856), c. 1558–60.

134 *The Times* (25 Apr. 1856), p. 12.

135 Parliamentary trains were the cheap trains which companies had to run for the public each day by Act of Parliament, hence the *double entendre* employed by most newspapers reporting the calamities which befell the legislature on St. George's Day 1856. The term gained wider acceptance through Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*: "the idiot who, in railway carriages, scribbles on window panes, we only suffer to ride on the buffer of 'parliamentary trains'."

136 PRO Adm. 1/5675, *Arrangements Made for Embarking Company at Southampton to Witness the Review*. Four foolscap pages bound in with the official organisational papers for the naval review, and signed 'J. McDougall, Southampton, April 25th 1856'.

137 *United Service Gazette* (26 Apr. 1856), p. 6.

138 *Examiner* (26 Apr. 1856), p. 257.

139 It is not clear whether Captain Milne and Sir Charles Wood were as blameless for the failings of the South Western Railway Company as was generally believed at the time. According to Mr Hutchins who spoke on the matter in the House of Commons on 25 April: 'His right hon. friend the First Lord of the Admiralty had forgotten to mention that the Admiralty issued a great many more tickets than the railway company anticipated': *Hansard*, CXLI (1856), c. 1561. Mr Henley, in the same debate, could not understand why, when the ordinary express train on the Southampton line, carrying few second-class passengers, took two hours twenty minutes to travel from Waterloo, the First Lord could allow himself to be gulled into believing that crowded trains could convey passengers five minutes quicker! It is interesting to note too that the former First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir James Graham, had allowed three hours for the legislature to journey from London to Portsmouth on the occasion of the 1853 naval review: *The Times* (9 Aug. 1853), p. 5; 'Business of the House of Commons, Mon., Aug. 8th', not cited in *Hansard*.

140 *Hansard* CXLI (1856), c. 1547.

141 PRO Adm. 12/623 (Digest cut 86); Seymour Papers, CR 114A/429; *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* (17 May 1856), p. 4.

142 *Colburn's United Service Magazine* (May 1856), p. 126.

143 *The Times* (24 Apr. 1856), p. 8.

144 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, LXXIX (June 1856), p. 722.

145 How much truth there is in this explanation given by the *Illustrated London News* (26 Apr. 1856), pp. 434–438 for the

silence of the guns of the fortifications remains to be ascertained. Most contemporary newspaper reports either offer no explanation or make the feeble excuse that it had been decided not to fire the guns for fear of alarming the ladies in their vicinity. Only the *Herald* gave a graphic description of the gunboat attack, contradicting the other reports by declaring that not only did the guns of Southsea Castle reply to the firing of the gunboats 'but when they did fire it was to some purpose, discharging their forty long 8-inch guns in one grand volley. The crowds of people who had collected immediately under the embrasures apparently had no idea of how close they could conveniently remain while ordnance of that heavy description was being fired. The effect of the volley was completely conclusive as far as they were concerned, for it was instantly followed by a grand rush and scatter in every direction, and in half a minute there was not a soul remaining within fifty yards of the fort': *Morning Herald* (24 Apr. 1856), p. 6.

146 *Idler: And New London Magazine of Criticism and General Literature*, No. 5 (May 1856), p. 315.

147 Seymour Papers, Warwick County Record Office, CR 114A/695/13.

148 A. E. J. Fanshawe, *Admiral Sir Edward Gennys Fanshawe G.C.B. A Record* (1904), p. 336.

149 Seymour Papers, CR 114A/427/5.

150 Seymour Papers, CR 114A/429. *The Portsmouth Station. Official Letter Book: Register of Letters Sent to Admiralty and of Some Received*. Includes arrangements for Spithead Naval Review, 1856; Martin Papers, Vol. LXXXIX, British Library, Additional MS. 41, 434.

151 *Naval and Military Gazette* (26 Apr. 1856), p. 264.

152 Surprisingly few critics dwelt on extravagance in relation to the review; they seemed more concerned about mismanagement. Yet it must be stated that there was an excess on the vote, Miscellaneous Services, for expenses incurred in providing refreshments for the legislature and Public Departments. The loss was made up out of savings on other votes, but the House of Commons ordered a return 'showing in detail, the total expense incurred in providing conveyance by special trains, accommodation in steamers or sailing vessels, and refreshments, for members of the two Houses of Parliament on the day of the late Naval Review at Spithead': *House of Commons Sessional Papers* (1857), Session 2, XXVII, p. 213. This return indicated that the cost of the review amounted to £910 15*s*. 8*d*. which included the cost of hiring plate, glass, furniture etc. In reality the return was very misleading since the total expenditure incurred by the Admiralty in connection with the entertainment of *all* 5075 invited guests (not just the legislature) amounted to £3974 5*s*. 5*d*.: PRO Adm. 1/7336B. An examination of the more detailed unpublished accounts shows that the *Transit*, which carried 458 guests (Peers and their wives) incurred expenses totalling £630 16*s*. 8*d*., whilst the *Perseverance*, which carried 500 MPs, expended £279 19*s*. 00*d*. This comparison was no doubt withheld from the official return to avoid angering members of the House of Commons who demanded it. It is interesting to note that the Treasury sanctioned the expenditure of £8500 simply to illuminate the battleships and large cruisers at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee naval review in 1897: *Great Britain, Accounts and Papers,* 4, *Navy Estimates*, 1899, LIV, 201, f. 519.

153 *Hansard*, CXLI (18 Apr. 1856), c. 1183.

154 *Globe* (25 Apr. and 26 Apr. 1856).

155 *Colburn's United Service Magazine* (May 1856), p. 127.

156 *Hansard*, CXLI (1856), c. 1556.

157 *Daily Telegraph* (24 Apr. 1856), p. 2.

158 *Leader: a Political and Literary Review* (26 Apr. 1856), p. 1.

159 NMM POR/P/59, *HM Dockyard Portsmouth. Admiralty In-Letters,* 1137, (1 May 1856).

160 *Ibid*., 1163 (3 May 1856).

161 Seymour Papers, CR 114A/429.

162 L. G. C. Laughton, 'Maritime History of Hampshire', in W. Page (ed.), *The Victoria History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, 5 (1912), p. 404.

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